NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
3 0109 00089 6988

THE ART THEATRE

BY

SHELDON CHENEY

LIBRARY
NORTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL

PN Cheney 29512
2266 The art theatre.
C5

DATE DUE

MAY 1 1 1981			
MAY 7 1984			
JUN 4 1984			
MAY 5 1986			
NOV 3 1987			
MAY 1 4 1991			
MAY 2 0 1991			

Subject To Recall After 2 Weeks

LIBRARY
NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA

DEMCO

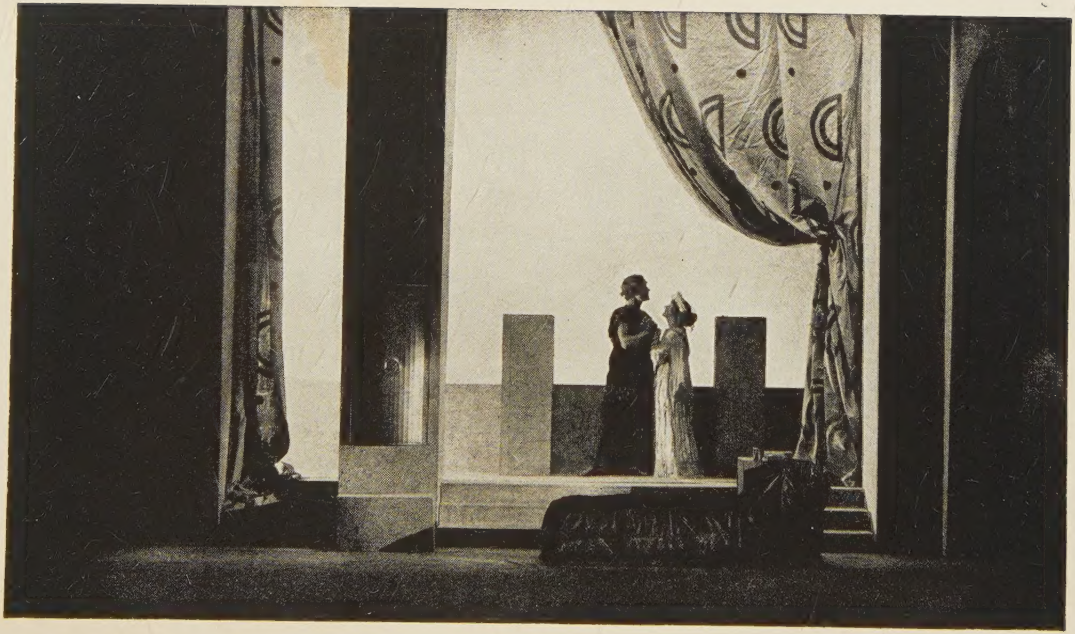
WITHDRAWN
NDSU

The
ART THEATRE




Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/arttheatre0000shel



HELENA'S HUSBAND

The
ART THEATRE

A Discussion of its Ideals, its Organization and its Promise as a Corrective for Present Evils in the Commercial Theatre

By

SHELDON CHENEY

With Sixteen Photographs of Productions at The Arts and Crafts Theatre of Detroit



New York
ALFRED A. KNOPF
Mcmxvii

COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY
ALFRED A. KNOPF

Published October 1917

PN
2626
.E5

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

This book has grown out of an unusual combination of circumstances. The first impulse toward its writing came when I was interested, more than a year ago, in a project (lately deceased) for an art theatre in Berkeley. The problems arising then sent me searching through a mass of fugitive material. One result was a determination to prepare "a model plan for an art theatre in a small American city." In the light of later experience I am duly thankful that I did not complete the plan with my then purely theoretical knowledge.

Instead I went to Detroit, where I saw from the inside the inauguration of activities at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, and had to do, in a subordinate capacity, with all but one of the subsequent productions. Last winter, as partial preparation for editing the newly founded *Theatre Arts Magazine,* I visited most of the progressive producing groups and little theatres of the East and Middle West, thus finding opportunity

for comparison and study of practically all the important manifestations of the new dramatic spirit in this country.

In spite of the indefiniteness of aim in such theatres, and the patent instability of their organization, I became convinced that in their activities lay the only real promise of a better dramatic art in this country. Because their roots were in native soil, I felt that here were beginnings of true community theatres—which collectively would be our ultimate national theatre. And because they were in the hands of artists, who, if immature and unsteady, were still sincere and forward-looking, these playhouses seemed clearly the forerunners of an American art theatre.

Their greatest fault was to be found in confusion of ideals and lack of organization and defined purpose. Each group was working blindly, without profiting by the mistakes of others, and without a definite basis for understanding the movement in its broader aspects. My first hope in this book is that it may provide accurate data about the most successful little theatres and art theatres; and that in its reconsideration of the ideals and aims of the movement, it may bring artists to a clearer conception of their creative duty—and perhaps inspire some with new enthusiasm and determination. Inci-

dentally I wish the volume to provide an account and analysis of the achievement of the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit during its first season —an achievement important enough in the history of the insurgent movement to warrant a permanent record.

My point of view differs from that of some other writers about little theatres, in that I consider them important only as steps toward something better. In all the excitement about *little* theatres we are in danger of losing sight of the higher ideal—the *art* theatre. I have tried to keep that ultimate ideal constantly in mind.

I am aware that my arraignment of the business theatre is too sweeping to be universally just. I know that there are exceptions to the rule of cut-throat business methods and art-blindness in the commercial theatre—that there are still actors who retain a dignified conception of their profession, and artists who have not prostituted their talents to commerce. But continued association with the theatre only strengthens my conviction that the arraignment is *substantially* true and just.

While this book is much more the result of independent thought and experience than was an earlier one, in which I tried to sum up modern tendencies in the theatre, I am still indebted to the writings of Huntly Carter, Gordon Craig and

H. K. Moderwell. I owe thanks also to Maurice Browne, Sam Hume and other theatre artists with whom I have talked over art theatre problems personally. Mr. Eric T. Clarke has put me under obligation for many suggestions in connection with the chapter on Organization and Management; and to William F. Gable I express cordial thanks for personal encouragement and inspiration.

Small portions of the material here presented have appeared in the pages of *Theatre Arts Magazine;* but the book is substantially new—written almost entirely during the summer of 1917.

S. C.

CONTENTS

Preface 5

Chapter I Present Conditions in the American Theatre 13

Inside and outside the commercial theatre — The business theatre and profits — The immature little theatre movement — First steps toward an art theatre — How the American theatre became commercialized — Effects upon playwriting, acting and stage-craft — Need for a new theatre — The great problem: How to professionalize the insurgent groups while preserving the amateur spirit

Chapter II The Coming of the Art Theatre 32

The American problem in the light of Europe's theatres of thirty years ago — The *Théâtre Libre* movement — Its service in ridding the theatre of artificiality and traditional stupidity — Its shortcomings — Beginnings of the art theatre movement — Gordon Craig — Adolphe Appia — The Moscow Art Theatre — Its lessons for American progressives — The Munich Art Theatre — Max Reinhardt's *Deutsches Theater* — The Abbey Theatre — Effects of the art theatre movement on the European theatrical situation — Why America has no professional art theatre — The New Theatre failure — America's first steps toward the art theatre type

Chapter III Ideals of the Art Theatre 56

The distinguishing mark of art theatre production — Its "art value" — The synthetic ideal — Appia's "inner unity" — Craig's synthesis of movement, light, colour and sound — Stylization — Undiscovered arts of the theatre — The experimental ideal — The ideal of sound management — The ideal of intimacy — Its mistaken aspects — America's progress toward art theatre ideals

Chapter IV The Artist-Director 74

Enlightened artist-directors our first need — Craig's ideal artist of the theatre — Huntly Carter's ideal of group-direction — The practical figure — The artist-director a modern creation — The

Contents

German *regisseur* — Sam Hume as an American example — His qualifications and ideals as typical of the artist-director — Maurice Browne as example — His methods and ideals

Chapter V The Question of Acting and Actors 96

Low state of American acting — Beauty of speech — Rhythm of movement — Group action and pictorial composition — How art theatre acting may differ from commercial acting — The discredited star system — The curse of personality — Must we import actors for our art theatres? — The little theatres and amateur acting — Advantages in use of amateurs — Disadvantages — Professionalizing amateurs — The amateurs of Moscow and Dublin — The actor's estate under the art theatre

Chapter VI The Question of Plays 124

The art theatre play and the journalistic drama of the commercial theatre — The "advanced" ideal *vs.* "pleasing the public" — Sam Hume's theory of meeting the public half-way — Analysis of plays at the Arts and Crafts Theatre — Maurice Browne and the no-compromise attitude — Relation between Chicago Little Theatre's plays and its financial troubles — Catholic choice of plays necessary — The classics — Poetic and realistic — Native and foreign — Encouraging native writers — The repertory system

Chapter VII The Question of Stage Settings 144

Stage decoration and the synthetic ideal — Evils of the old stagecraft — Belasco and the naturalistic revolt — The artists' revolt — The improved pictorial setting — The plastic setting — The decorative setting — Stylization — Symbolistic settings — Light and color — Unifying devices — Gordon Craig's screens — Sam Hume's adaptable setting

Chapter VIII The Question of Audiences and the Community 175

Necessary relation between theatre and community — Organizing audiences without supplying theatres — Where the Drama League fails — Defining a community theatre — Potential audiences in American cities — Advantages of the subscription system — The Free Folk Stage of Berlin — Extension work through the schools — Theatres as social centres — The Ypsilanti Players — The Prairie Playhouse — Settlement playhouses — The Neighborhood Playhouse and the New York situation

Chapter IX Organization and Management 188

Lack of business efficiency in little theatres — Value of sound management — The three-fold system of organization — The con-

trolling group — Questions of ownership — The artist-director — The business manager — His duties — System in handling money and book-keeping — Budget-making — Income and expenditures during an average little theatre season — Advertising — The venal press as a factor in the degradation of the theatre — Endowment

Chapter X Buildings and Equipment 217

The synthetic ideal and theatre architecture — The architecture of the show business — First steps toward the ideal building — Design and decoration — Stage equipment — Size — The ideal playhouse of the future

Chapter XI Unrealized Ideals 228

Slightness of the insurgent achievement so far — The ideal American art theatre — The way of its coming — Present foundations

A Discursive Bibliography 233

Appendix: Productions at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, Season of 1916–17, with Casts 241

Index 247

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1 Helena's Husband (*Frontispiece*)
2 The Intruder *facing page* 20
3 The Constant Lover *facing page* 30
4 The Chinese Lantern *facing page* 50
5 The Glittering Gate *facing page* 64
6 The Romance of the Rose *facing page* 82
7 The Lost Silk Hat *facing page* 100
8 Sam Hume as Abraham and Frances Loughton as Isaac *facing page* 116
9 Lonesomelike *facing page* 130
10 The Wonder Hat *facing page* 150
11 The Tents of the Arabs *facing page* 162
12 Helena's Husband *facing page* 172
13 Abraham and Isaac *facing page* 182
14 A Doctor in Spite of Himself *facing page* 192
15 A Doctor in Spite of Himself *facing page* 212
16 Suppressed Desires *facing page* 224

Note on the illustrations: All the illustrations are from photographs by Frank Scott Clark, and all represent productions at the Arts and Crafts Theatre of Detroit. Eleven of the settings shown are arrangements of the permanent adaptable scene designed for the theatre by Sam Hume. He made most of the adaptations, certain ones being worked out in collaboration with Miss Katherine McEwen. Detailed descriptions and ground plans of the more important scenes will be found in the chapter on stage settings.

THE ART THEATRE

CHAPTER I

PRESENT CONDITIONS IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE

THE art theatre has no past in America. Even in the present it is but lightly involved in the dramatic situation. But for the future—the only direction of time that really counts when an art is young—it is the one certain corrective for the evils now existing in the playhouse.

In considering the theatre as an art it is possible to overlook almost entirely the recognized playhouses and so-called "artists" of today, and yet lose nothing of substantial worth from an evaluation based on lasting standards. The entire organized institution of the theatre in America, as it is known to nine out of every ten intelligent people, may be safely disregarded by the writer who is concerned with world movements and art values.

Thomas H. Dickinson recently said that the

history of the English theatre of the last twenty years had been a history of "outsiders." Insofar as America has had any dramatic history worth recording in the last two or three decades, it too is concerned only with outsiders. The inside institution is important only as a background and contrast: for the illuminating mistakes it has made, for keeping alive a noble tradition (which it failed to live up to), and for setting up an absolute dictatorship which, within the last five years, has irritated and stimulated a few thinking artists into revolt.

The forces that count in the theatre today are the forces of revolt. The actual progress toward an ideal theatre has been made in fly-by-night projects, by dissatisfied groups, by outcasts. These outsiders have usually been rich in ambition and artistic impulse but bankrupt in money and business control. The future of the theatre as an art, nevertheless, lies in their hands. It is bound up with qualities and refinements so foreign to the existing institution, and its development demands abilities so clearly impossible under the present organization, that the only salvation lies in further development of the insurgent movement.

A survey of present conditions, while leaving no doubt about the immense material strength of the

regular theatre, and the anaemic weakness of the outsiders, still discloses a general condition of restlessness and a gradual but steady gain on the part of the minority. It shows, moreover, a real fear in the ruling mind on account of the petty encroachments already made by the insurgents, as if the established faction sensed the certain crumbling of the present order.

I

The American commercial theatre, organized as an all-embracing, interlocking system, is conducted as a speculative institution, with its first object the making of profits. It would be idle to say that it has nothing to do with art, since that is in one sense the sole commodity in which it deals; but its art is the art of commerce, the art that will please the greatest number of average people, the art that seeks its appeal in sentiment and prettiness and sexual emotion and situations begetting uncontrolled laughter—a sort of *Hearst's-Cosmopolitan-Ladies'-Home-Journal* art. Insofar as it touches within the boundaries of the art that is both true to life and spiritual, it does so through chance inspiration and accidental co-ordination.

Occasionally one sees in a Broadway theatre a production that stirs the soul, that evokes that

mood which is a response to art alone. But the next forty or fifty productions are so completely innocent of any suspicion of spiritual values that one is forced to put down the exception as a random thrust. In the end it always comes back to the same analysis: the American commercial theatre is organized to earn profits in competition, and its art will always be pulled down to that standard which experience has shown will please the largest group of money-spenders. The art that goes beyond the obvious is discouraged, and the art that reaches down to deeper truths goes unrecognized.

If our sculpture were produced under such a handicap we should never have a St. Gaudens or a Jo Davidson, but only a race of manipulators and imitators producing those horrid sweet statuettes which our pseudo-art stores now import from Italy by the thousand, for "the art trade." And if a group of businessmen controlled all the studios and galleries as absolutely as they control the theatre, we should never have a Sargent or a Davies, but only a race of Harrison Fishers and Howard Chandler Christies and similar corrupters of the art morals of the newsstand public. The theatre alone has been so fettered that it has stifled creative effort, discouraged originality, and driven out the true artist.

Under such conditions it would be useless for the artists to try to compete with the majority theatre on its own ground. The Washington Square Players, for instance, have suffered a distinct loss on the artistic side due to the competition they have had to meet on the business side since they elbowed their way to Broadway. Such a group may be able to stick until it makes its permanent place in the dramatic business world; but in the meantime its position both financially and artistically is likely to be precarious. The normal corrective is far more likely to be something distinctive that will grow out of the little theatres, something entirely disconnected from the regular organization, endowed if necessary, but always devoted primarily to art rather than profits, and pursuing its way without regard to competition—unless, indeed, the regulars come over into the new fold, and meet the competition of art on *its* ground. Then everybody will be an outsider and nobody unhappy.

II

What one has to place beside the discouraging picture of the commercial theatre does not at first beget much comfort. The "little theatre movement," distinctly valuable in its small way, is yet hardly more than a promise. The faults of

the little theatre are obvious: an alarming tendency to fade away before the first summer comes, a fine scorn of business management, and lack of confidence and stability of purpose. It is sometimes timid, frantically disclaiming any intention toward reform, and admitting only a desire to "please ourselves"; and sometimes boastful, calling attention to its littleness as if that in itself were a virtue, instead of simply a sign that it hasn't grown up. It is, nevertheless, the most hopeful thing in the theatre world today, because its roots are in native soil and because it is reaching up beyond those realms of commerce and materialism in which the business theatre constantly exists. It is rich, moreover, in those things that the other theatre lacks: artistic taste, cultural background, creative energy, and imagination.

As these two, the Goliath and the potential David, stand side by side, we who have a vision of a true art theatre—something dedicated to vital plays, inspired acting and creative staging, well-managed, combining the insight of the amateur spirit with the solid core of hard work and finished achievement of the professional stage—we sit by, sometimes, to be sure, wringing our hands in despair, at others believing fondly that the

youngster will grow up into ways that are both beautiful and wise.

A year ago the prospect was black enough; but the season just closed has afforded many reasons for renewed hope. The Chicago Little Theatre emerges from its worst storm with three years of financial security ahead; the Arts and Crafts Theatre of Detroit, with no other endowment than freedom from the rent burden, closes a series of typical art-theatre productions with a clean record both artistically and financially; a score of new groups with artistic possibilities have sprung into being; and Dunsany, most typical of the new dramatists, has achieved wide popular acceptance solely through the insurgent groups.

Even though we see clearly that America has not yet developed one normal, permanent art theatre, we who care, have seen the time ripen for the establishment of such a theatre: we see its distinctive technique taking shape; we see artists worthy of it—playwrights, directors, designers, even actors—struggling up out of the average little theatre incompetence; we see other important artists, now dissipating their talents in the commercial theatre, who could be cured of the conventional mannerisms and taints and brought over to a soundly organized progressive institution; and we

see millionaires curious about the new theatre, and trembling on the verge of endowment. Some day we shall shove two or three of them over the edge, and I am confident that we shall be able to show that beyond lies a field as inspiring for them as for the artists. These millionaires, moreover, live not only in New York but in Detroit, not only in Chicago but in San Francisco; and they will build not an aristocratic national theatre but native art theatres. (A real millionaire is not necessary. A quarter- or even an eighth-millionaire would do, if he saw the true relative value between art and his business.)

If we have seen each new attempt fail so far, it has been sometimes because wealth tried to take the place of artistic taste, instead of endowing the artists, or because artistic enthusiasm refused to link up with the practical budget-making common sense which is the only excuse for asking wealth to co-operate. But no matter how many failures there have been, the spirit of the little theatre and community theatre has persisted, and new perceptions of theatre art have developed; and I for one believe actively in the swift coming of organizations to conserve that spirit and satisfy those perceptions, organizations combining high purpose, sound management and willingness to work hard through the urge of art



THE INTRUDER

—the only combination that spells good dramatic art.

III

Let us for a moment strike back a generation or two and see how the American theatre became so thoroughly commercialized. Thirty years ago America owned excellent repertory and stock playhouses and great actors, and the drama gave promise of developing side by side with the other arts. Through some fault it degenerated instead, and came to a place of actual degradation in the art world.

Twenty-two years ago two groups of influential managers combined to control a larger field of production than either could dominate alone. The alliance became so powerful that other managers joined, either in the hope of sharing the larger profits or in self-defence. The "syndicate" adopted the methods common to lawless "big business" of that day. It started a merciless campaign to stamp out competition and kill off rivals. It bribed into its ranks as many big men as it could, and then frightened into line as many more, big and little, as could be bullied. Then it fought the remaining few, managers and actors, by relentless warfare, closing theatres to them, and using all the familiar tactics of the lockout.

After a short campaign so few rebels remained that the American theatre lay practically helpless in the hands of a few New York speculators. No cornering of a market was ever more skilfully or completely manipulated.

Certain gains under such a monopoly are easily recognized. For owners of theatres outside New York the new system meant a continued succession of companies with tried plays, in place of the previous uncertain bookings. When rightly managed it prevented two similar and worthy productions playing in opposition one week, with an empty week following. The theatre market was in a sense stabilized. And of course the combination was a success from the speculators' standpoint. Wasteful experiment was eliminated, profits formerly scattered to a hundred independent agencies now flowed regularly to the one headquarters in New York, and price-raising was possible on a cornered commodity.

It is necessary to add, before turning to the other side of the case—the losses entailed in the commercializing process—that about a decade ago there came a revolt against the syndicate. It succeeded to the extent of opening the field to a rival business organization. The burden was partially lifted from the shoulders of the small owner of theatres on the road, and the small pro-

ducer came back into the field under definite limitations. But it was distinctly a business revolt, and it failed to change conditions so far as the artist is concerned. He remained either a servant of the businessmen or an outsider. We now have two co-operating syndicates instead of one.

The evil effects of the system in general were: loss of freedom for the artist; destruction of the training-grounds in which both actor and playwright had formerly gained experience and early success; and ruinous control by New York over all the important theatres in the country. Repertory suffered a quick death, since one long run costs less money than frequent change of bill; and independent experiment soon disappeared. In those individual contributive arts that go to make up the larger art of the theatre—playwriting, acting, staging, decoration—the havoc wrought was so great that we have not today one actor to compare with the best of the repertory days in this country, nor one playwright comparable to a score developed in the progressive movement in the European theatre, nor one director or decorator worthy to be placed beside the thirty or forty enlightened ones in Europe. We have not, indeed, one theatre artist of any sort who is internationally important.

In the matter of playwriting, centralized control

of all the theatres in the land meant standardization of types of production, so that the dramatist who brought forward anything new found every trying-out ground closed to him. "Kept" playwrights became the rule. It was easier and safer to repeat a proven formula, or adapt a foreign success, than to risk money on untried types of play. If a native playwright did get by with an undoubted success, it was easier for the manager to repeat variations on that than to give the next fellow a chance. Such a false standard of lavish, if inartistic, staging developed, moreover, that it cost a manager approximately $5000 to try out a play. Under such a burden of expense even those producers who retained some desire to encourage native art hesitated to touch anything new. The American playwright for two decades thus was left without laboratory or studio. Only with the coming of the little theatres, and especially of such organizations as The Provincetown Players and the Players' Workshop, has his testing-ground been to some extent restored.

For the actor the conditions were—and are—even worse. The breaking up of the repertory and dignified stock companies destroyed the training school where so many of the older artists gained their most fruitful experience and inspiration. It made the living of the actor insecure,

there being no longer any chance of association with the same company in a permanent home for even a season at a time. Even actors of the highest class are today required to live lives of perpetual uncertainty, because their contracts are dependent solely upon the financial success of plays and companies chosen and presented without regard to their own preferences and ideals. They have no choice but to seek peripatetic employment under a system that makes permanent interest impossible, and one that denies leisure for proper study of their art.

But perhaps the most destructive practice in this connection was that of creating and exploiting "stars." The star system implies on its face an unbalanced and undemocratic art, in which the poor is necessarily placed beside the worthy. Of the stars themselves little need be said. Some of them are potentially great actors and would show it if they could cut loose from the system. But it cannot be insisted upon too strongly that star production is pernicious for the minor actor. Not only does it create a false ideal in the company, an ideal that impels the young actor to cultivate and parade every idiosyncrasy of personality and learn every trick which might lead to stardom, but it deadens originality and precludes breadth of training and understanding, by con-

demning the rising artist to year after year of type parts. The long run and the star system are largely responsible for that dearth of intelligent clean-speaking actors which exists on the American stage today.

The businessmen who changed the actor's attitude from that of an artist to that of a mere wage-earner are further responsible for the recent wholesale desertion from a great art to a great industry. I refer, of course, to that tide of promising actors who are showing their apathy by going over to the well-salaried but inartistic moving picture business. Had the ideals of the playhouse not been lost, monetary advantage would not have decided their choice.

The effect of the system in the matter of staging was no less unfortunate than in the fields of playwriting and acting. The lack of artist-directors, which today seems the chief obstacle in the way of developing art theatres, is directly due to the standardization of methods in the regular theatre. The business man took control and delegated the designing of the settings to one helper, the designing of costumes to another, the stage management to another. He insisted, moreover, that each one of these helpers do his work in a way that squared with accepted notions of stage art, in this case, of course, business art. Under such a system initia-

tive in stagecraft was crushed, the ambitious young artist who went into scenic design soon became a machine, and play production in America finds itself twenty years behind its German counterpart.

Recently the businessmen woke up to find that European theatres had discovered methods of staging infinitely better than the accepted ones, and that in this country certain little theatres and an opera house had imported or developed artists capable of creating some of "the new effects." The commercial managers immediately bribed the best of these artists to come to their rescue. The results were interesting from a purely decorative standpoint, but something was lacking. Broadway pieces were decked in the clothes of the new stagecraft—but remained vulgar. The point that both sides overlooked was this: these artists can do their best work only when they are given full charge of the production (if they are directors as well as designers), or when they work with other artists and not with businessmen. So long as a single business man is allowed to leave his business office and interfere with activities behind the curtain, the sort of staging that creates artistic illusion and unity of impression will be impossible in the theatre. Joseph Urban and Robert Edmond Jones take orders from the shopkeepers in

the theatre; and their work is so changed that the spirit of the new staging still finds truer expression in Chicago or Detroit than in New York.

In one other direction the theatre system has put us decades behind the best development of the Europeans. In theatre architecture we are still struggling along in a musty, Victorian sort of way. With a few notable exceptions (for the most part products of the little theatre movement) our playhouses are not in any sense temples of art, but only vulgar amusement palaces. At best they are showy and ornate; at worst they are inexcusably gilded and varnished and stencilled. They reflect the taste of the businessmen. Again it is business art, designed to attract the average.[1] In the atmosphere created by such architecture, true theatre art is all but impossible.

Such are the losses to the contributive arts, which have resulted from the organization of the theatre as a business. To these I may add one other misfortune: the people of this country have lost all respect for the theatre. They visualize it as a business, like insurance, or selling grocer-

[1] I think that I have adopted the phraseology of Max Eastman here. In his book "Journalism vs. Art" he stated very clearly the case of business art as it concerns the American magazine. In writing of the very similar case of the American theatre I have found it difficult to avoid one or two of his phrases—for which I hereby acknowledge indebtedness.

ies. To be implicated in theatre work even involves more or less risk of one's reputation and standing in the community. In Europe (excluding England) the theatre is considered with a certain amount of reverence. It is one of the arts. Each leading playhouse is as important to its town as the art museum or the cathedral. In America the gas works and the department store are much more likely to be pointed out with pride to the visitor.

IV

It took many years for critics to realize the full mischief that was being worked through the manipulation of the theatre as a speculative medium. As long ago as 1900 clear-sighted commentators like Norman Hapgood threw searchlights on the situation, and Walter Prichard Eaton and others have kept the issue alive. But it has taken us many years more to learn that the theatre cannot be saved from within. Only now are we beginning to understand that revolutionists who secede from the older playhouse and men trained in the other arts must be charged with the creation of a new theatre.

If I have indicated a certain lack of confidence in the little theatres as agencies of reform, it is because the fetich of size does not impress me at

all. I am quick to say that what gain we have made in face of the loss through commercialization is to be credited to the little theatre movement. At least the playwrights again have laboratories for experiment, and a new generation of decorators is in training. But—and here is the central constructive thought of my book—unless we carry the little theatres beyond the ideals most of them stand for, *unless we professionalize them while preserving their amateur spirit, unless we organize them efficiently for art production,* we shall be little better off than before they came. For otherwise we shall have only a smug business institution beside an amateur institution revelling in artistic anarchy and bankruptcy.

At least three groups, in Chicago, Detroit and New York, have risen above that reproach of amateurishness and crudity which has come to be an implication of the term "little theatre." They are America's first steps toward art theatre organization. They have been proving the ground as they developed, and they have shown that an audience exists. They have helped, moreover, to make a clear cleavage between the commercial theatre and a new professional art theatre as yet in its infancy. But they must be stabilized and similar groups must be developed out of little theatres and art societies elsewhere.



THE CONSTANT LOVER

Conditions in the American Theatre

For the real art of the theatre in America depends upon the development of fixed local playhouses with resident companies dedicated to repertory production of the best that dramatic art has to offer. Not only is the commercial theatre unable to realize the finer ideals, but the very nature of the typical art-theatre play is such that it cannot be transported by travelling companies, and cannot be brought to its finest expression without the aid of artists working in the light of the amateur spirit. Until there are independent theatres and organizations in the several parts of the country, directed by artists and not businessmen, and capable of staging and interpreting adequately the best from the Greeks and Shakespeare to Shaw and Dunsany, we shall look in vain for the coming of the art theatre.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE ART THEATRE

THE title of this chapter is a prophecy and not a description, so far as this country is concerned. But I say the more confidently that it is prophecy rather than mere speculation because one can show that already there exist in Europe a number of playhouses so removed, by ideals and organization, from the commercial theatre as to merit the distinctive group title "the art theatre"; and that in America there exist today the symptoms of discontent, revolt and amateur enthusiasm which preceded the rise of such institutions in Europe.

From the artist's standpoint the established European theatres of twenty and thirty years ago seemed almost as hopeless as does the organized American theatre of today. The protests of Antoine in France, of Fuchs in Germany and of Gordon Craig in England, when re-read sound remarkably like those of the "radicals" of this country. Conditions in Europe were never quite so bad as here in the matter of business getting a

strangle-hold on art, and deadening all originality and initiative. But dramatic production was quite as stereotyped, quite as one-sided, as on this side of the Atlantic. The conservatives had the whip hand, and the progressives could renounce their better selves or turn to another art.

I

The revolt started with the *Théâtre Libre* movement. How far that development differed in ideals from the art theatre movement has not been sufficiently emphasized in the past. Its ultimate aims were quite foreign to anything implied in the later development. But it was negatively very important, for it cleared away a lot of the old superstitions of the stage and opened the playhouse to innovators and amateurs.

It was in 1887 that the French actor Antoine founded the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris. For nearly a decade he produced there, with the unqualified approval of a small group, and with the bitterest censure of the conservative critics and public, the most radical compositions of naturalistic and realistic writers. Then he founded the *Théâtre Antoine,* where he continued the naturalistic tradition, but without the worst excesses of the earlier venture. The movement spread to Germany with the foundation of the *Freie Bühne* at Berlin in

1889; and in 1891 J. T. Grein established the Independent Theatre in London.

All these theatres exhibited earmarks of a definite movement. All were private or subscription ventures—merely a way of evading censorship. All announced their object as rebellion against the monopolistic and anti-libertarian commercial theatre. All were definitely dedicated to naturalism or realism as an art standard.

In France the movement was narrower than in Germany and England. Although a very few plays of Ibsen and others of the Northern dramatists were introduced, French drama was produced almost exclusively. Perhaps because of this provincial limitation there developed no French school or movement to carry on the impetus created by Antoine's group.

In Germany the *Freie Bühne* was more truly a free theatre in the international sense, and it had the widest effect upon the regular playhouses. Its work, indeed, was so well done that the grip of traditionalism was largely broken in Germany by the end of the century. The original revolutionary playhouse went out of existence, but theatres throughout Germany had then been opened to the new drama, and the way had been cleared for the coming of new ideas of stage production.

In England the movement culminated in the

development of an exceedingly important group of realistic dramatists: Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, and a half dozen lesser writers. But, as in France, the achievement was not far-reaching. The institution of the theatre as a whole was very little changed. The playwright with new ideas still finds himself an outsider, and such contributions as England has made to an art-theatre technique can be summed up in the independent pioneering of the exiled Gordon Craig, such short-lived experiments as Granville Barker's brief "seasons" as director, and the more permanent but less inspired repertory theatre ventures.

It is probable that the whole realistic movement in the theatre has been vastly over-rated as a positive contribution to dramatic art. Its negative value as paving the way for the next phase is incalculable at this early time; and its social value as restoring a healthy relationship between the theatre and contemporary life is immense. But its final achievement when judged by art standards, its contribution to the development of a distinctive modern art of the theatre, has been slight even as compared with the as-yet-immature "art theatre movement." The naturalists and more extreme realists, in the desire to limit themselves to showing a segment of life, or

to proving a thesis, missed something of the spiritual, the imaginative, the eternal. At worst, their plays are displeasing, vulgar, and even immoral and disgusting; at best they are narrowed down to an unimaginative corner of art-expression.

The *Théâtre Libre* movement, then, insofar as it concerns the present study, had only these effects: it demolished superstitions regarding professionalism, opened the theatre to new types of drama, substituted a natural (if uninspired) sort of acting for the old artificiality and conventionality, and proved that a simple style-less setting or no setting at all is better than the old crassly artificial or consciously spectacular background. For the really constructive phase that followed, for the beginnings of the theatre to be built in the clearing thus made, one must go back to an independent impulse—to the Craig-Appia-Reinhardt movement, if one may so name it from the three most notable artists concerned.

II

The most important figure in the new theatre, because most inspiring and most typical of the artist to come, is Gordon Craig. He was fitted by both heredity and early training to take a place in the accepted theatre. But during his brief experience there he chafed under its limitations and

restraints, and finally broke away entirely, to become the ablest and most active crusader for a new art of the theatre—the greatest outsider of them all.

Craig pointed out first the lack of art in the existing playhouse, charging that the men of the theatre were purveying a sort of play based on a false conception of dramatic ideals. While castigating the bunglers in the commercial theatre, he protested against the playhouse being taken over by either the literary artists or the easel painters. He also turned his guns on another set of reformers, being always an unsparing critic of realism, and never missing an opportunity to call for imaginativeness and poetry to help save the stage.

After his destructive criticism came a constructive one in the form of a plea for artists of vision in the theatre. The usual production, he rightfully argued, is not a work of art at all, because it lacks that binding spiritual quality, that unity of feeling, which can be achieved only through the creative effort of an artist. The performance is a thing of scattered effect depending upon chance association of playwright, actor, scene-painter, electrician, carpenter, and stage-manager. If there is one brain supervising all, it is that of a business man, incapable of visualizing

the production in imaginative form, and necessarily delegating bits of control to this and that assistant. Craig therefore called for the training of a new race of theatre artists, of creative producers who would be able to impart an impressionistic unity to every production they brought to the stage.

Through all the years since he promulgated the artist-director theory, Gordon Craig has sought passionately the methods by which the artist could obtain unity of mood in the theatre, and he has re-tested every element of stage craftsmanship in relation to a unifying principle. He did more than any other artist to reform stage setting, combating on the one hand the ridiculous artificiality and the spectacular vulgarity of the old style scene, and on the other the false perfection and meticulous appeal of the naturalistic method. He sought to substitute suggestion in place of imitation, simplicity in place of elaboration, expressiveness in place of showiness; and always he insisted upon a definite spiritual or emotional relationship between the background and the action. He insisted that current ideals of acting must change: that the actor must subordinate his personality and become a willing part of a larger design, obedient to the will of the artist-director, and that the pernicious star sys-

tem must be destroyed. He attached a new value to movement on the stage, pointing out the emotional effectiveness of figures moving in design, of shifting light and shadow, of changing pattern of colour. And finally he pointed out that the stage production, which started out to be an art appealing to the eye—theatre means "a place for seeing"—had become merely a platform for the recitation of words appealing through the ear to the intellect and emotions. He made his plea for a new art of the theatre which would be not merely mentally or emotionally stirring, but visually beautiful and æsthetically satisfying. In these things he laid down foundation principles for the whole art theatre movement.

An artist equally original, but more elusive, is Adolphe Appia. He has never wielded the same influence, because he has failed to get his ideas before the world in concrete form; and in England and America his influence has been slight because there has never been a translation, or even adequate interpretation, of his important books. While applying his experiments exclusively to opera, he arrived at certain conclusions which have come to be basic principles of the new race of theatre artists: that the realistic and painted-perspective modes of stage setting are impossible artistically; that there must be unity of play,

setting and action; that the actor is the factor to be emphasized within this unity—that he and not a trick of staging must be the centre of the picture; and finally, that lighting can be largely utilized as the uniting force, binding together all the elements of the production, by providing an all-pervading spiritual atmosphere. The emphasis on the value of light, and the insistence that the lighting must be definitely designed to further dramatic meaning, is Appia's most distinctive contribution to the new staging.

From these two, Craig and Appia, the art theatre movement may be considered to start. Of those who helped shape it, of those who added to the mass of theory, or proved or disproved this or that theory in practice, I shall say little except as they happen to be concerned in four playhouses: the Munich Art Theatre, the Moscow Art Theatre, Max Reinhardt's *Deutsches Theater* and the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. I am conscious that this is an arbitrary choice; but I think that these offer in their beginnings the nearest parallel to our beginnings in America, and in their achievement the most suggestive of ways in which we should grow.

To indicate the breadth of the new spirit, however, it is well to remember that France claimed one of the first experiments in the new field, in

the establishment of the *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* in 1893 as a sort of artists' protest against naturalism; that Jacques Rouché made sincere efforts to realize the synthetic art-theatre ideal at his *Théâtre des Arts* in Paris; and that Jacques Copeau did some of the most important of all pioneering work at his *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier*. But these and the English ventures are less important than the four chosen for more extended description.

III

The famous Moscow Art Theatre was founded under circumstances strikingly like those surrounding the beginnings of the most important little theatres in this country. The group originating the venture was more amateur than professional, and its object was definitely to explore regions untouched by the regular theatres. It was distinctly a reform theatre, and like most of its kind it utilized at first amateur actors and students, and sought its designers in the fields of the other arts.

After renouncing the ideals of the commercial theatre, and its methods of playwriting, acting and stage setting, it turned first to the exploration and exploitation of realism. It sought to create the illusion of life by detailed imitation.

The experience was valuable in ridding the theatre of the old artificiality of acting, and in exposing the faultiness of current modes of staging. But naturalism and uninspired realism soon proved unequal to the demands of a typical art theatre organization.

When the Moscow Art Theatre started its search for the imaginative, the lyrical, the poetic, and the symbolic, instead of seeking mere truth to life, it began to justify its name. At the same time it began to seek actively that synthesis of forces which is the most distinctive mark of art-theatre production, aiming to bring play, action, lighting and setting into a spiritual unity. It was not always successful, since one hears reports of decorations that outdid the actors, and of Shakespeare plays that had ceased to be Shakespearean; but the productions as a group went far to prove that there is such a thing as a distinguishable art-theatre technique, a method that is at once a simplification and an intensification of the drama, a creative contribution on the part of director, actors and designers, which throws a spiritual atmosphere over the play as presented in the theatre.

A third phase brought the Moscow playhouse to a broader basis, where it followed neither the realistic nor the symbolistic or idealistic alone,

but sought to harmonize the best it had found in both directions of its early search. It may well be that the drama of the future lies in a compromise between these two ideals, or rather in a fusing of the intense life-truth of the one with the spiritualizing idealism of the other. It may be, indeed, that the Moscow Art Theatre has made its greatest contribution to modern art through its experiments in search of an enlightened and spiritualized realism.

But the points which should most interest American progressives are these: A non-star organization was brought into being, in which the actors studied and worked intelligently and harmoniously together, while always obedient to an enlightened artist-director. The theatre is efficiently administered as a profitable business venture, but businessmen have nothing to say about types of play or methods of staging, and the project is not subject to shifting this way or that for the sake of profits. The administration is three-fold: first, a holding group which includes men of high ideals and artists of broad insight; second, a body of actors who are willing (and can afford) to accept a moderate wage because they love their work and enjoy permanent employment; and third, an artist-director and a business secretary who are free from interference by

each other or from above so long as they produce results satisfactory to the enlightened holding group. While preserving an experimental ideal, the theatre has arrived at a type of production which brings play, action and setting into one harmonious whole. It has developed artists who have gone out to help revolutionize theatres formerly devoted to commercial ideals. And finally it has refused to be satisfied with a building and equipment inadequate to the requirements of a broadly artistic type of production; the architecture is restful, and the mechanical features afford the widest opportunity for the subtler effects of staging.

The Munich Art Theatre has often been held up as a model architecturally, and I wish to emphasize here certain relationships between such a building and the development of the new art of the theatre. Our American theatres are notoriously vulgar, and it is doubtful whether the insurgent movement in this country will not lag until we have a group of playhouses that are in harmony with the spirit of dramatic art at its best. Many visitors to the Munich Art Theatre, accustomed to American and English vulgarity, or to French ornateness, have testified to the remarkable sense of restfulness experienced upon entering the Art Theatre. In such an atmosphere the

spectator is immediately put into a state of receptivity, and the producer's battle to create a spiritual mood, a single harmonious impression, is already partially won. This sympathetic sort of architecture, no less than equipment of the most modern type, is necessary to a full realization of the new ideal. Imagine Gordon Craig in the average Broadway playhouse!

But the Munich Art Theatre is important for more reasons than appear in its architectural form—though that may be taken as symbolic of an all-pervading artistic thoroughness. Its search, to quote Huntly Carter, has been for "simplification, synthesis, rhythm and beauty" —and such aims alone set it apart from the great mass of theatres. It seeks to "preserve the unity of the action of the drama in co-operation with sound, colour, motion." One limitation should be noted: the stage was built too shallow, because the directors were concerned in the beginning with a too-narrow conception of the new art of staging—that of the "relief-theatre." The pioneer work accomplished there, nevertheless, is on a level with that of the Moscow Art Theatre, in both its practical and its inspirational aspects.

First, the impulse for its founding came from without the old theatre, and it has consistently utilized the talents of inspired outsiders. Sec-

ond, it immediately discarded all the old paraphernalia of the stage, and set out to prove that conventionalized settings, aided by simplicity, breadth and suggestion, could create illusion more satisfyingly than the most elaborate imitations in the naturalistic method. Third, it stood for synthesis of forces on the stage, but with the emphasis on the actors, who, besides carrying the story, supplied that decorative quality which was formerly supposed to reside in the setting alone. Fourth, the efficacy of the production in producing artistic effect, the art value as distinguished from the mere dramatic value or acting value or spectacular value, was discovered to be dependent upon style, upon the imparting of an all-pervading *feeling*, a reflection of the individual genius of the artists concerned in the staging. And fifth, while it remained typically a theatre of the artists, it was not thereby condemned to business mismanagement.

The *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin has been cited many times as the best example of a "practical art theatre." Broadway managers will tell you (or would have told you before admiration of any German virtue became a crime before the bar of a war-blind public) that the reason we have not such theatres in America is that no such enlightened audience exists here as that of the Ger-

man capital. For my part I believe that the trouble lies in the lack of a director like Max Reinhardt, who combines business genius with a comprehensive knowledge of the art of the theatre. Such a director would immediately find the means to build in New York a theatre embodying the German architectural ideal—there is no possibility of dodging the fact that it is the best in the world today—and in it he would present a series of plays clearly artistic in general tone, and yet commercially successful. He would do this because he would be an opportunist, with an eye to his public. That is, he would vary his experiments and his productions of limited appeal with others that leaned toward the tried and accepted formulas; and he would add enough of sensationalism to be sure of sufficient audiences. Of course the resultant theatre would not be so typical an expression of the movement as would a playhouse modelled after the Moscow Art Theatre. It would be a compromise; but a compromise like the *Deutsches Theater* would be infinitely better than anything now existing in New York.

If Max Reinhardt has compromised with the older theatre and with the public, he nevertheless has made the *Deutsches Theater* one of the most notable in the world, and in many ways a

model for progressives everywhere. His stage is as completely equipped according to standards of the new stagecraft as any other in Europe, and in staging and choice of plays he has been ready to accept the newest ideas for trial. He has drawn many of the leading German designers and painters to the stage, if not with uniformly satisfying results, still with broadening and gratifying effect upon both the theatre and the artists concerned. The acting of his company is one more assurance that the star-system belongs to a lower type of production, and that only with intelligent ensemble acting can the best be accomplished. And if some of his productions overshoot the mark, there still is evidence in the success of most of them that the indispensable factor is thoroughness, unity attained through one director's all-seeing genius.

The experience and achievement of one other theatre are peculiarly suggestive when examined beside the American problem—not so much, perhaps, in relation to the ultimate American art theatre, but as a guide and encouragement in our beginnings. The Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the theatre of the Irish Players, was founded and has continued as an expression of the amateur spirit. Its first phase was "The Irish Literary Theatre," an ephemeral institution brought into being by

three literary artists, Edward Martyn, W. B. Yeats and George Moore—typical outsiders. After the Literary Theatre's short career closed, its ideals were taken up, broadened and carried on by the Irish National Theatre, to which the chief new contribution was brought by another theorist, in the shape of a simplified, distinguished mode of acting. A group of native amateur actors under the direction of an inspired leader began that career which has carried the name of the Irish Players through all the dramatic world. Native playwrights, stimulated to effort by the opportunity of seeing their plays sympathetically and intelligently produced, wrote dramas of not only local but universal appeal. Other new impulses were added, the most important perhaps being that of Gordon Craig's simplified methods of staging—for that added reform of scene to reform of playwriting and acting. And so there came into being an Irish theatre in which the amateur spirit lived under professional organization, a theatre in which beauty and sincerity were guiding principles.

The economic history of the Irish players also holds a lesson for the American theatre. The Dublin project struggled along at first in rented halls and without adequate stage facilities; but at a critical time a woman of wealth recognized

the merit of the workers, remodelled a theatre, offered it rent-free for six years, and provided a small subsidy. It reminds us that most of the really fruitful art schemes find outside financial aid in the years of struggle, and that American little theatres must find several wealthy people with Miss Horniman's insight and generous appreciation before the impulse toward an art theatre can find full expression.

The effect of the art theatres on the general theatrical situation in Europe is interesting, although it offers no direct parallel to conditions in America. In Germany the whole country has grown with the movement, and it is not unusual to find in court and commercial theatres occasional or even frequent productions approaching art-theatre ideals. The Germans had no monopolistic, utterly commercialized institution to fight against, and they already had many endowed playhouses. Their problem now is merely to increase the already large number of experienced and inspired artist-directors, and gradually to reorganize their theatres with these men in charge. France too has its endowed state and municipal theatres, but it has profited little by the achievement of the art-theatre groups. Indeed, one would say that France had resolved to remain ultra-conservative, or even provincial, so far as



THE CHINESE LANTERN

theatre art is concerned, were it not for two things: the existence in Paris of the *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier,* founded and directed by the inspired amateur Jacques Copeau; and the unexpected and revolutionary appointment in 1914 to the directorship of the Paris Opera of Jacques Rouché, an arch-progressive. In England the continental art theatres have had unmistakable influence on the development of a group of repertory theatres in the provinces—the most hopeful sign in what would otherwise appear a dramatic waste. These repertory theatres not only are keeping alive the best heritage of the realistic movement, but are making some progress toward the art theatre's synthetic methods of production. They await only the coming of a race of artist-directors. In its possession of such theatres England is one important step ahead of America.

IV

In Europe the art theatre revolt was largely amateur, but it had its professional side as well. Its leaders were as likely as not to be secessionists from the regular theatre. But a business despotism begets no artistic rebels—and so the whole new movement in America has developed from the outside. In the professional American theatres there were no discerning art-

ists, no men big enough to understand the revolution in Europe and to strike out on parallel lines in this country. It remained for college groups and mere theatre-lovers to divine the significance of the Craig-Reinhardt phenomenon, and to begin in their inexperienced way the building of a new theatre.

There are those who will tell you that the endowed professional art theatre has been tried in America and has failed—referring, of course, to the New Theatre. In the first place that institution was not endowed. If it had been, the building would still be given up to experimenting with art, instead of being dedicated as it is now to the most pernicious influences in the American theatre, capitalized sex appeal, musical trash and general Ziegfeldism. In the second place the director of the New Theatre venture, Winthrop Ames, although he stands as the most enlightened of the Broadway managers, has never quite grasped the art ideal in its finest form. He was not the typical artist-director. In certain directions he did wonders at the New Theatre, particularly in the building up of a group of actors individually capable but devoted to the ensemble ideal—and his example will prove of value later; but he failed to co-ordinate the departments of

staging to the extent of obtaining the unity of impression so typical of art-theatre work. But the most important cause of the New Theatre's failure to establish itself as an integral part of American art life lay in the fact that it tried to begin at the top, in imitation of the most pretentious European repertory theatres. It was never a native theatre, with roots in American life and with native experience behind it. If we ever have in America a successful institution of the aristocratic sort that the New Theatre was intended to be, it will come after the democratic, native art theatre has been established as a part of American cultural life.

Disregarding also Winthrop Ames' Little Theatre, since it is merely the most artistic of the commercial theatres—its littleness is due largely to the desire to evade fire regulations, and it is a typical long-run, non-democratic, non-native business theatre of the best sort—one may ask where, specifically, our first steps toward American art theatres are to be found. The *spirit* of the new movement is to be detected in almost every city in the land, and little theatres are multiplying startlingly. But a thorough sifting leaves most of them in the offensively amateurish class, with not more than a half-dozen carrying

the best of amateur ideals up to a union with professional standards of work. Of these I shall concern myself chiefly with three.

First, there is the pioneer Chicago Little Theatre, with its permanent organization which has weathered the severest storms, and which in spite of a curiously unstable position in its community has succeeded in making the largest American contribution toward an art-theatre technique. Second, there is the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, which is less securely organized for the future, but which in its first year has made America's nearest approach to a season of typical art-theatre productions on a self-supporting basis. Third, there is the Washington Square Players group, which, while realizing less clearly the ideals of the art theatre, has made many notable productions, and has pioneered by trying out new methods before the most jaded public in the world.

In addition to these I shall have something to say about the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, the Portmanteau Players, the Provincetown Players, the Prairie Playhouse at Galesburg, and the Wisconsin Players, all important in certain connections, but none quite so clearly accomplishing significant work as the three first named.

V

My historical work is done. I have tried so far to show how the American theatre came to its present distressing position, and how a somewhat similar condition in Europe led to the establishment of art theatres as a natural corrective. I have sketched our small beginnings and have tried to suggest the direction of natural growth toward a similar corrective in this country. Now I wish to explore in detail the changes which have already come and those which are implied in the art theatre movement, trying to shadow forth ideals, describing methods of production, and outlining systems of organization. By basing my deductions on the experience of the European art theatres, and by linking this up with what has been learned by the few advanced experimental playhouses in America, I hope to arrive at conclusions which will help to stabilize the whole progressive movement, which will perhaps enable workers in the little theatres to arrive at a clearer conception of the goal we all must strive for, and which, finally, may inspire artists and playwrights with renewed determination and renewed desire to do creative work.

CHAPTER III

IDEALS OF THE ART THEATRE

THERE is, I believe, a distinguishing quality by which the typical art theatre production can be marked off as different from the ordinary production in the commercial theatre. Call it spiritual unity, rhythm, style—what you will—there is unmistakably an earmark of higher art upon it: a something that distinguishes a production of Craig or Reinhardt, of Browne or Hume, from that which bears, let us say, a Shubert or K. and E. label. I believe, moreover, that the attainment of this quality, the development of artists who will expend their genius to bring this elusive something into the playhouse, is the most important problem in the theatre world today.

I

There is in every important drama a latent *art value,* as distinguished from dramatic value, or acting value, or spectacular value. This "over-value" is to be realized in the theatre not alone

by a synthesis of the clearly marked elements of staging—by perfect co-ordination of play, acting, setting and lighting—but also by the spiritual transformation of the whole through artistic vision. This implies the existence of a director who is artist enough to harmonize the provisional or incomplete arts of the playwright, the actor and the scene designer, and at the same time develop, by a creative method of production, an inner rhythm, an impressionistic unity.

It is conceivable that a certain play might be presented in a commercial theatre with the dramatic "punch" stronger, the acting better and the settings more striking than in a presentation of the same play at an art theatre, and that the latter production would still be the more interesting and more satisfying. For the art-theatre method would impart a unity, a harmony of elements and a stylistic impression which the other would wholly lack. The true art theatre will, of course, have better acting and stronger plays than any seen in the commercial theatres today; but the existence of a distinctive art-theatre manner of production explains why plays put on by amateur or mediocre professional actors, by such organizations as the Washington Square Players or the Chicago Little Theatre, for instance, occasionally afford finer pleasure than that usually

experienced in the best commercial playhouses.

The first ideal of the art theatre, then, is not merely simplified and suggestive settings, or ensemble acting, or poetic plays; it is the attainment of this elusive quality which makes for rounded-out, spiritually unified productions. Perhaps the best name for it is *the synthetic ideal.*

As it concerns the dramatist the synthetic ideal means that the playwright either must be the director of his own productions, or must submit his written work to the creative processes of an artist-interpreter—just as in music the composer must leave his work to the interpretation of a violinist, or pianist, or orchestra-director. The artist-director, if he be not the playwright, must in turn be able to grasp the inner rhythm of the dramatist's work, conceive settings, lighting, acting, movement, costuming, etc., in harmony with that rhythm, and at the same time stamp the visual result with his own individual genius.

As it concerns the actors, the scene-builders, the electricians and the other workers on the stage, it means that they must always be obedient to the will of the director, working sympathetically, "with answering minds," to create the one desired impression. It is true that the actor may enjoy a certain latitude of interpretation, but it must

always be within such limitations that it will not disturb the ensemble as visualized by the director.

The synthetic ideal is big enough to embrace many creeds of playwriting and many types of play. It has room not only for the imaginative, poetic and symbolic, but for the realistic and romantic. The synthetic method is applied most easily to plays with a clearly defined "atmosphere" about them—the plays, say, of Maeterlinck or Euripides or Dunsany; but it is possible to apply it also to Ibsen, to Hauptmann, to Masefield; and it is not impossible that even Shaw might be brought by this method more completely into the theatre—although as yet the realistic drama leans too far toward life to claim an undisputed place in art-theatre production.

The written play itself confines the producing artist within certain limits. But since the director's work is creative, since he reinforces the poet's conception by bringing to the staging an originality of his own, no two directors will arrive at exactly the same result: each will impart his own distinctive touch, or evoke a particular mood. Thus the synthetic result always bears the stamp of the personality of the artist-director; it reflects his peculiar manner of producing the play as distinguished from the manner of any other producer, and it reveals the quality of his

individual artistic vision. In the spiritual "overtone" it bears the stamp of his genius, and in the technique of production it is instinct with his "style."

This individual, personal element prevents the synthetic ideal from ever becoming merely the concern of an over-specialized group, or the pursuit of a single theory of production. If any number of our little theatres become art theatres —that is, start definitely and intelligently the search for the principles underlying art-theatre technique—we shall have as many types of synthetic production as there are artists in the movement.

II

The synthetic ideal, although seldom called by that name, lies behind the indeterminate longing, theorizing, and actual work of practically all the important insurgents of both Europe and America.

It is what Adolphe Appia sought when he tried to create an "inner unity" for the Wagner music-dramas by binding the setting and action to the music through atmospheric lighting. Taking his pattern of moods from the music, he designed a series of lighting effects in perfect harmony with the emotional and spiritual sequence of the

drama; he subordinated the settings through simplification and by throwing over them a veil of light or darkness, really substituting creative atmosphere for the usual painted or plastic scene; and he intensified the action by cunning manipulation of light and shade, playing groups of actors against masses of shadows and bursts of light, or half-revealing them in foggy greys. Appia's great contribution to the modern search for an art-theatre technique lies in what he taught later artists about the harmonizing value of lights.

The synthesis sought by Gordon Craig is one in which movement largely takes the place of psychological action, but in which scene, colour, lights, voice and music have place. In order to achieve perfect unity of these various elements, he would if possible have the artist-producer be playwright, designer of settings, lighting and costumes, and composer of the music, as well as director. In case he cannot write his own drama he must experience a complete vision of the original poet's intention. Craig goes farther than any other leader in his insistence upon the absolute necessity of a man of vision in the director's position, and he would give that man the greatest breadth of original invention. He writes: "I let my scene grow out of not merely the play, but from broad sweeps of thought which the play

has conjured up in me. . . . We are concerned with the heart of this thing, and with loving and understanding it. Therefore approach it from all sides, surround it, and do not let yourself be attracted away by the idea of scene as an end in itself, of costume as an end in itself, or of stage management or any of these things, and never lose hold of your determination to win through to the secret—the secret which lies in the creation of another beauty, and then all will be well."

That is a poet's statement of the art theatre's problem and its ideal: "the creation of another beauty" while "concerned with the heart of" the dramatist's play, "and with loving and understanding it." In solving the problem Gordon Craig came to many radical conclusions, regarding subordination of setting, repression of the personality of the actor, designed movement, and the value of colour and light in creating atmosphere, which have since become commonplaces of the new movement. He arrived at other conclusions that have been slower of acceptance. Because the average actor was unable to sink his personality entirely in that of the character played, because he could not make himself clay in the director's hand, Gordon Craig was at one time ready to work with puppets only. And

when he was pursuing a synthetic art of the theatre based on decorative movement of figures, colours and lights, he was ready to discard the spoken word, since it seemed to be an interruption of the mood. But in all his experiments, through all his changing theories, the chief end has been the creation of mood, the evoking of a single impression in place of the scattered appeals of the usual dramatic production.

Since this first ideal of the art theatre, this creation of another beauty, is outwardly visible only in the setting, the lighting and the method of acting, it is easy for the shrewd opportunist to pick up the external features and achieve a sort of caricature of the true art-theatre production, without grasping the secret heart of the thing. The difference between the old sort of production and the new seems to lie entirely in the manner of staging; and so the astute commercial manager picks up a few mannerisms, gives out that he is staging in the new method, and draws a crowd.

Even so eminent a director as Max Reinhardt cannot be entirely freed from the charge of mannerism: he has often made the method obtrusively evident, to the loss of the original author's intended effect. There is no doubt that he has achieved a unifying system; but the unity often

is something superimposed by Reinhardt, and not a synthesis growing out of the heart of the play.

III

Stylization in its broadest sense means the unifying of the play by carrying a definite "style" through all parts of the production. In this broad interpretation the term is a synonym for synthetic treatment. Stylization has recently been narrowed by many writers to mean the application of individual style to the play's settings. But even when the unifying process is thus confined to the *mise-en-scène,* it is still a powerful factor in imparting continuity and singleness of impression to the production.

It happens that the designing of appropriate settings is the direction in which all countries have made greatest progress toward the new ideal. The artists concerned have developed certain inventions which are definite aids to the attainment of synthetic effect. New lighting systems make possible the creation of atmospheric effects which are delicately attuned to the most subtle emotional or spiritual values of the play; new mechanical devices make possible rapid change of scene, thus doing away with the long between-acts waits which used to do so much to destroy continuity



THE GLITTERING GATE

of interest and mood; and adaptable settings, wherein certain elements remain through several changes of scene, carrying a subconscious sense of oneness through several scenes, bring a new harmony of background. Kenneth Macgowan speaks, for instance, of "a curious unity" achieved when Joseph Urban used a permanent "skeleton" setting through all the scenes of "The Love of the Three Kings." And William Butler Yeats writes enthusiastically of a lingering "tone" of restfulness and beauty running through a series of arrangements of Gordon Craig's screens.

It may be that through the search for the ideal, through applying the unifying principle to the best plays we now know, the art theatres will discover new forms of drama more beautiful than any so far developed. Perhaps that decorative, typically theatric, de-humanized art which many of us have visualized fleetingly while we dreamed over the pages of Gordon Craig's essays will become a reality when the art-theatre method is studied, played with, and carried to its most characteristic achievement. It may be that Claude Bragdon will realize his dream of an art of moving colour; or that Maurice Browne and Cloyd Head, already pioneers in America's pursuit of an art-theatre technique, will prove that beyond all the experiments with the story-plays

of the playwright there lies a sort of rhythmic art of the theatre as yet ungrasped and only half-guessed. But until we restore artistic unity to the stage, until we fit the play again to the theatre and learn thereby the secret of unified impression—until, in short, we follow up the first ideal of the art theatre, synthetic production—we cannot achieve what lies beyond.

IV

Because it has been sadly neglected by the commercial playhouse, a second ideal of the art theatre stands out clearly—a minor one, when measured beside that so far considered, but important. It is the experimental ideal. Recently a group of little theatres has come into existence devoted entirely to the trying out of the work of beginning playwrights and stage decorators. The most important example is the playhouse of the Provincetown Players. Such theatres seldom make any claim to the creation of finished works of art. In the first place they are usually crippled by inadequate stage equipment; in the second place they prefer to concern themselves with art in the making rather than with the polished product. There is a legitimate place at present for such theatres; they are, indeed, immensely important because they offer almost the

only laboratory facilities for the playwright who refuses to play the game in the commercial way.

These theatres seem to me to be a sort of between-times expedient. They are a first step toward the establishment of an adequate non-commercial theatre. When the American art theatres are built on their foundations, the experimental ideal must be preserved; but all the present crudities must disappear in the plays presented before a public. The art theatre must be a show place, a gallery rather than a studio. But the point is that it must not become merely a museum. It must keep in touch with the present and the future—as most European endowed theatres do not, to their present dishonour. It seems, then, that the art theatre must have its workshop annex. It must allow the author who is not quite ready for a professional production, facilities for seeing his play acted on a stage; for he will learn more in that way in two hours than in ten years of studying and writing in his library. The Wisconsin Players already have their workshop stage, whereon members try out their plays before carrying them out to larger audiences; and the Moscow Art Theatre has its "studio" for the same purpose. Provision for such a feature should be made in every art theatre plan.

V

A third ideal which every art theatre should keep before it is that of sound business management. When the little theatre groups righteously and courageously revolted against the business monopoly of the regular theatre, they scorned the good as well as the bad of the commercial system. In the regular theatre the artist had been obscured in the business man; now the business man was lost entirely in the visionary artist. The result has been a notorious series of financial failures among the little theatres. The fault must be corrected before the change to the estate of art theatre can be made. To quote Winthrop Ames, it is necessary "to avoid the artistic disadvantages of purely commercial management, and still to remain self-supporting"—which is to say, self-supporting under the terms of whatever endowment the theatre may have. Of this ideal I shall say more in the chapter on Organization and Management.

VI

Many little theatres have set up what they call an ideal of intimacy, by which they mean that they want to bring the audience into close *rapport* with the actors on the stage. The truth is that

no production in the theatre is good until it does bring a sense of intimacy to the spectator. There are spectacular plays which may be fitted for immense stages and barn-like auditoriums; but any play which has to do with the art theatre demands a representation which will hold the audience in spiritual communion with what transpires on the stage. It seems to me that this sort of play can be as intimately produced in a theatre seating six or eight hundred people as in one seating one or two hundred. The ideal of intimacy is really included in what I have called the synthetic ideal; for if a mood is created, the sympathetic reaction will come as readily in the larger as in the smaller place.

The ideal of intimacy has even been destructive in certain little theatres. The crowding of stage and auditorium has destroyed the illusion, the conventional relation of artist and audience by which art is made to live. The spectator, instead of looking at the action through a frame and accepting the convention, and so being freed to imagine himself a part of the action, is pushed so close to the stage that he is continually conscious of the actors as people.

I, too, want to bring the spectators into touch with the action in such a way that they will lose themselves completely in the beauties revealed,

and that their souls will be purged by their experience of the dramatic story; but it seems to me that many of the devices adopted ostensibly for this purpose are likely to do more harm than good. I am not even convinced that the apron stage offers any considerable advantages except in very exceptional cases, and I am totally out of sympathy with the practice of bringing players to the stage through the auditorium. The Portmanteau Players' placing of the figures of *Memory, Prologue* and *You* in the audience is nothing more than a bit of childishness, and Reinhardt's and Ziegfeld's processions through the auditorium are merely "stunts" designed to attract by their novelty. We must distinguish more clearly between an art of the people—Percy MacKaye's "civic drama," in which masses of people participate—and an art presented by artists for the people to enjoy by seeing and hearing. The latter sort is likely to be more intimate than the other, and nothing is to be gained by bringing tag-ends of the performance before the curtain-line. It would be equally logical to paint the edges of a picture across the frame with extensions to the wall on either side, in an effort to increase illusion. The result is a violation of the law of conventionalization, of the tacit understanding between artist and spectator that the one shall

confine his illusion within certain limits, and the other accept and forget the limitation. The ideal of intimacy in the theatre implies not an extension of the action into the auditorium, but projection of the mood of the action to the spectator by means of an all-sufficient artistic expression behind the curtain-line.

VII

When one realizes all that the synthetic ideal implies, it becomes very clear that its attainment is impossible in the commercial theatres. Not only do the businessmen who monopolize the regular institution lack the necessary vision and artistic insight, but the great majority of business theatres are so bad architecturally that they would be impossible bodies for the soul of the new art. The most enlightened of the commercial producers, Winthrop Ames, with his finely equipped and wholly charming Little Theatre, might by a mere change of policy take place in the pioneer ranks of art theatre directors. But it is a transformation possible to not more than two or three of those now engaged in the gambling game on Broadway.

What, then, will be the relation of the successful art theatre to the business theatre? So long as the art theatres are crippled financially and

the commercial theatres wealthy, the businessmen will continue to take many of the best actors and decorators developed by the new movement, and they will buy the rights to Dunsany plays even though they cannot stage them adequately. Even after the art theatres are properly endowed the theatre speculators will doubtless continue to take away a certain number of ideas, men, and occasionally plays, as they are proved of financial as well as artistic value. But the art theatre as an institution should be so firmly established that it will not have to deal with the commercial theatre except on its own terms. That means that America must have sooner or later a group of local art theatres covering every city of importance from coast to coast;[1] so that a play which proves its worth in Chicago can immediately be prepared for presentation by the artist-directors at the local theatres of Boston and San Francisco. There is already the basis for such

[1] It is true that many American cities now have stock companies; but these are in no sense art theatre groups. They are organized to compete with the commercial travelling companies, and their standards in choice of play and staging fall to the business theatre level. They feel that they must be in the high-rent district, and there is the consequent necessity of playing eight times each week and making weekly changes of bill—thus mercilessly overworking the actor and leaving ragged ends in staging. The average American stock theatre is characterized by haste and compromise of art for profit.

an exchange, plays which are first tried out by the Provincetown Players, for instance, being seen later on the stage of the Washington Square Players, and then going by little theatre channels to St. Louis, Detroit and other centres.

Nothing will be able to prevent New York from sending its endless stream of revues, musical comedies and plays of the moment's mode, with their "second" companies, to the road towns. But it is likely that on the road there will come a clear separation of the art of the theatre from the amusement business; and the events that have to do with dramatic art will centre at the native playhouse. A typical art-theatre production may occasionally go into the commercial circuit, but it will be the exception. This is true not only on account of the artistic short-sightedness of managers and workers in the majority theatre, but because the art-theatre play by its very nature is unsuited to quick transportation, hasty installation and the interpretation of commercially trained actors. The distinguishing mark—the sense of unity, the subtlety of mood, the attainment of the primary synthetic ideal—demands a theatre and a drama of its own.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARTIST-DIRECTOR

THE one figure about which the activity of an art theatre centres is that of the artist-director. He it is who gives the theatre its individuality and its place in the art world. When one thinks of the Moscow Art Theatre the name of Stanislavsky immediately comes to mind, and the *Deutsches Theater* just as inevitably suggests Reinhardt. Similarly, our own nearest approaches to the art theatre type are directly associated with the names of directors: the Chicago Little Theatre is clearly an outgrowth of the artistic vision of Maurice Browne, and the Arts and Crafts Theatre is definitely stamped with the personality of Sam Hume. The whole ideal of the art theatre, indeed, is such that it demands as the first step toward its attainment the training of a race of such artists of the theatre.

I

The man who has led the fight for a new organization of the theatre is Gordon Craig, and

it was he who first insisted that the cure for present evils could come only with the development of a new type of theatre artist, a creative, all-seeing, omnipotent director. In a frequently quoted passage which has become a classic among advanced thinkers in the theatre he has indicated the need for artist-directors:

"I have many times written that there is only one way to obtain unity in the art of the theatre. I suppose it is unnecessary to explain why unity should be there as in other great arts; I suppose it offends no one to admit that unless unity reigns 'chaos is come again.' . . . And now I wish to make clear by what process unity is lost.

"Let me make a list (an incomplete one, but it will serve) of the different workers in the theatre. When I have made this list I will tell you how many are head-cooks and how they assist in the spoiling of the broth.

"First and foremost, there is the proprietor of the theatre. Secondly, there is the business manager who rents the theatre. Thirdly, there is the stage-director, sometimes three or four of these. There are also three or four business men. Then we come to the chief actor and the chief actress. Then we have the actor and the actress who are next to the chief; that is to say, who are ready

to step into their places if required. Then there are from twenty to sixty other actors and actresses. Besides this, there is a gentleman who designs scenes. Another who designs costumes. A third who devotes his time to arranging lights. A fourth who attends to the machinery (generally the hardest worker in the theatre). And then we have from twenty to a hundred under-workers, scene-painters, costume makers, limelight manipulators, dressers, scene-shifters, under machinists, extra ladies and gentlemen, cleaners, program sellers: and there we have the bunch.

"Now look carefully at this list. We see seven heads and two very influential members. Seven directors instead of one, and nine opinions instead of one.

"Now, then, it is impossible for a work of art ever to be produced where more than one brain is permitted to direct; and if works of art are not seen in the theatre this one reason is a sufficient one, though there are plenty more.

"Do you wish to know why there are seven masters instead of one? It is because there is no one man in the theatre who is a master in himself, that is to say, there is no man capable of inventing and rehearsing a play: capable of designing and superintending the construction of both scenery and costume: of writing any necessary

music: of inventing such machinery as is needed and the lighting that is to be used.

"No manager of a theatre has made these things his study; and it is a disgrace to the Western theatre that this statement can be made."

In order to obtain unity, then, in order to stamp a theatre production with the vision characteristic of all true works of art, Gordon Craig wants a director who is master at one and the same time of playwriting, staging, costume and setting design, musical composition, and lighting. This super-artist would stage his production with no other helpers than skilled workmen. I wish that I could have faith in the birth of a race of such artists; but I think that one such genius in a century is a generous estimate of the probable world output. If we are to go on to any sort of achievement in our generation or the next, it is probable that we shall have to violate Craig's principle to the extent of separating the functions of playwright, director of staging, and composer of the music. These three men must be made to work together in what may be called group-creation; but there is not in the world today one man combining in himself the talents necessary to discharge the triple creative duty satisfactorily. Nor does it seem to me entirely necessary that the artist-director should be able to write his own play

and compose the incidental music. If he is able to visualize the play in its deeper, spiritual aspect—if he is able to find its secret heart, and love and understand it, if I may so paraphrase Craig's own words; if he is then able to do all the creative work involved in staging and rehearsing it; and if he finally is able so to inspire a composer with the feeling, the mood, of the intended production that the latter will invent incidental music in harmony with the other elements: then he comes as close to Craig's ideal as one can expect in a practical world. And that will be close enough to secure the salvation of the theatre as an art.

II

While thus desiring to soften Craig's dictum, I do not wish to get so far away from it as does that keen critic and stimulating writer, Huntly Carter. In his interesting book about Max Reinhardt he outlines a theory of co-operative production, under which the director is to be only a leader in a group of creative artists, including playwright, stage manager, designer of settings, and so on. I wish, nevertheless, to quote Carter's words at some length, if only to reinforce Craig's ideas about unity and direction as fundamental principles:

"Nowhere is the theatre equipped or organized to give the widest expression to the drama of the soul. As it stands it is quite unable to serve as a house of vision. All that it can do is to show artistic intention, give hints, throw out suggestions, offer scraps of vision and imaginative interpretation, turn out pretty odds and ends of pictures, wonderfully pretty bits of imagination, wonderfully ugly bits of so-called realism, wonderfully deft bits of stagecraft. But nothing it has done or can do in its present condition has brought it or brings it within measurable distance of producing the complete vision, the design of the poet filled in by answering minds, unified and vital in all respects. . . .

"The demonstrable fact is that the theatre always has been, and is still, a vastly inferior, imperfect, and disjointed instrument of dramatic expression. In England especially is this true. There the surroundings of the theatre are grotesque and degrading; its construction is bad, its form obsolete, its design and decoration serve neither to preserve the gravity, dignity, nor simplicity of beauty. Its auditorium is rudimentary; its three-sided stage belongs properly to the Stone Age; and its lighting, scenery, properties, and other mechanical aids, though effective on occasion, never escape the suspicion of being what

they are—theatre stuff. And if the temple is imperfect, its priests, as Mr. Craig rightly maintains, are imperfect also. If the construction and mechanical contrivances of the theatre are crude and bad, the human directing, controlling, and interpreting force is not much better. It lacks unity. In short, the great number of units engaged in the work of the production of a play are not properly organized as a body to give that play the widest and most complete expression. They have not a vision in common, but they interpret each in his own way. As a rule they are a spineless and disjointed crew, without the faintest conception of a possible unity. . . .

"The new and significant thing in the theatre is the expression of the Will of the Theatre by co-ordinated minds, each artist taking the keenest interest in promoting the artistic work of the theatre, each artist desiring to attain the best effect, not only for his own sake, but also for that of his fellow artists. This is what may be called the expression of the Will of the Theatre. It is individual and collective striving of the highest degree. Each artist wills to attain his best individual effect, yet wills to attain the same end as the other members of his group, an end which only collective volition can assure. Thus the Will of the Theatre springs from a common

action and a common sentiment, the love of the artist for the theatre, and its function is to give the widest expression to the Will of the author. Thus Max Reinhardt interrogates the alternative which Mr. Craig puts forward. Apparently he has no sympathy with the Napoleonic tyranny, and aims to replace Mr. Craig's seven-headed director by a seven-headed group of sympathetic and efficient artists who will together produce something as great and individual as a Gothic Cathedral, with all its parts so powerfully and perfectly willed that its infinite worth is apparent to the least of men."

The trouble with this sort of collective production is that artists—at least those who are original enough to count—find it difficult to work together harmoniously. Usually it is a case of one being strong enough to intimidate the rest, and thus able to "spread" his department at the expense of the others; or else the group breaks up in a row. Unless there is the utmost sympathy between the several artists, moreover, there is great danger that the old lack of co-ordination will creep in: the stage-manager will conceive the play in one mood, the chief actor in another, and the scene-designer in a third, and everybody's teeth will be set on edge when the opening night comes.

Huntly Carter's ideas about collective produc-

tion were clearly designed to fit Max Reinhardt's system. For Reinhardt is not a creative artist in Craig's sense; he is a very intelligent organizer who leaves the creative processes to others in the group of which he is leader. Each member of the group is supposed to be "a related part of the complete interpretative mind." But the student of Reinhardt's work soon discovers that he is by no means uniformly successful in harmonizing and relating the several elements. The fame of his productions rests more upon the even accomplishment of his excellent acting-machine, and upon the pictorial splendor of some of the settings designed by "his artists," than upon attainment of an artistic unity within each play. He has brought together the most remarkable group of managers, actors, artist-designers, and workmen ever associated in one theatrical project; but he has yet to prove that the collective creation of such a group, when directed by an organizer rather than an artist, can have the same distinctive, all-pervading atmosphere as the productions of a true artist-director.

III

Gordon Craig wants an artist-ruler who will not yield to his helpers any of the creative processes, and who will rule his workers as an



THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

autocrat; Huntly Carter wants free expression in a group of artists, with merely an organizer to hold the group together. It is probable that the practical ideal lies between the two views.

My own idea of the probable working-out of the matter is this: the theatre will accept Craig's figure in his general aspect of artist-ruler, but will free him from the necessity of writing his own play and music. This, it seems to me, is possible because: first, the playwright's work is in a sense a finished product, and there is no danger of a clash over it—his script is the starting point, and the director is free to take it or leave it; and second, music is so much an art of mood that the composer, once understanding the requirement, is extremely unlikely to produce a score out of keeping with the playwright's intention or the director's conception. These two points aside, I believe that Craig's described artist of the theatre must and will be realized before we can have an art theatre worthy of the name. He will combine the creative offices of the following "artists" of the existing theatre: director, stage-manager, designer of settings, designer of costumes, designer of lighting. For the work of these men is such that disarrangement in one direction means disarrangement in all the others.

He must *feel* the production in all its parts,

and he must then have power to confirm or veto the contributions brought forward by those in the departments of lighting, acting and setting. But he does not necessarily have to do the work of all these men; indeed, he would be foolish not to simplify his own task by turning over to helpers such tasks as their capabilities fit them to do. The distinction, perhaps, should be one based on *imagination.* His must be the imaginative conception of the effects to be created in each department. This leaves to actor and stage assistants freedom for self-expression within certain limits, but never to the extent of violating the mood of the whole as established by the director.

The theory concerning the artist-director has come to such general acceptance among thinking people that one very seldom hears argument against it except from those who, for business reasons, do not wish to see the theatre led out of slavery. But occasionally a critic insists that the principle is wrong because it means injecting a second artist between playwright and public. The dramatist's work, the argument goes, should be put on the stage according to his instructions as put down in the stage directions, without change. That is exactly like saying that a musical composition should be played as it is printed and

not by an artist; or, in other words, that a school-girl with reasonably good mechanical control can give a truer rendering of the composition than can a Paderewski or a Kreisler. A written play, when considered not as literature but in relation to the theatre, is no more a completed work of art than is a music score. The processes of acting, rehearsing, and designing lighting and settings, are creative; and unless there is a co-ordinating mind, a binding artistic sense, the production will be as expressionless, as incoherent, as the school-girl's playing.

IV

The theatre of the past has seldom if ever known the artist-director. What he brings, a synthesis of the arts, co-ordination of the departments of the playhouse, is modernity's contribution to the theatre. Certain periods in history have been known as the golden ages of playwriting; others are celebrated as the ages of great acting; in still others spectacle reigned supreme. Today we excel in none of these contributive arts; but we have a new conception, a new ideal of a perfect harmony of them all. The past has been willing to accept an incomplete art of the theatre, for the sake of verbal poetry, or inspired acting, or beautiful stage pictures, or because,

seeing the greater ideal, it despaired of attaining it with the imperfect means at hand. The present, with vastly improved methods of staging, has the ideal almost in its grasp—if it breeds artists great enough.

Goethe in his old age had at least a dim vision of a new art and of a new type of artist who would be its master; and Wagner had a very definite conception of a union of all the arts—but, be it noted, of a union rather than a synthesis. Then came Craig and Appia, outlining the new theory clearly and pointing to the methods of practical achievement. After them followed a few men who approximated the artist-director type—Stanislavsky, Fuchs, Starke—and a host of more or less competent workers seeking the ideal, some rather successfully and others with half understanding.

Most of these men direct theatres in Germany. The German régisseur is, indeed, the world's closest approach to a living embodiment of Craig's super-artist. He seldom has more than a small fraction of Craig's own inventive ability, and he does not do his own playwriting. But he is usually an artist of taste, and his special work is the supervision of the production *as a whole;* he is charged not with creative work in one department, but with creation of harmony through his

imaginative contribution to every department. He is a master of lighting, he designs the settings, he sets the tone for the actors and supervises their movements and speaking.

But the German régisseur could not save the American theatre to art, even if we could import him at pleasure. Our problems are different, and we must begin farther back, with a pioneer type of our own. Putting aside the few Broadway producers who are big enough artistically to make the leap from commercial managership to art theatre directorship when the appointed time comes, I wish to write at some length of two American examples of the artist-director type who have developed outside the regular playhouses—Maurice Browne and Sam Hume.

V

Perhaps the most important point to be noted about Sam Hume is his wide knowledge of *both* theatres, commercial and insurgent. He knows the regular game, but he has steadfastly refused to be a part of it ever since he first caught glimpses of the new ideal. He has the cultural background which the average person in the commercial theatre, whether manager, actor, or designer, lacks. But his academic training was mixed with practical work—he did not swallow

a college education whole. After four years at a far Western university he left without a degree but with assets which many a graduate has learned to envy later: experience in the leadership of men, and practical training in the work he intended to follow. For he had acted not only with amateur groups, but with visiting professional companies, and he had helped in the production of plays on stages both indoors and out. Then followed his brief experience in the commercial theatre, beginning in America and ending in England. Travel in Europe helped to convince him of the cheapness of standards existing on the English-speaking stage, but it was not until he talked with Gordon Craig that the vision of a new art of the theatre spread before him. In the months during which he worked side by side with Craig he learned much not only about ideals but about the methods through which the greatest of the progressives hoped to revolutionize stage art.

By way of maintaining the balance, of keeping his grasp on that which the usual worker in the theatre lacks, Hume returned to an American university after his association with Craig, gaining a new historical and theoretical perspective on his work, and incidentally decorating himself with two useless degrees. Then followed

a period of directing amateur and semi-professional groups. But it was in 1915 that he first came to wide public notice through an extensive display of models and drawings illustrating modern stagecraft, which he assembled and exhibited in Cambridge, New York, Chicago and Detroit.

By that time Hume had the combination of qualifications which fitted him for the work an artist-director is called on to do. First, through his broad education he had the taste which enabled him to distinguish real drama from the type of play passing current on Broadway. Second, he had enough practical knowledge of the traditional stage to be able to choose such existing mechanical devices and technical aids as might be of use in a theatre constructed according to the new ideals. And third, he had become thoroughly imbued with the new spirit, and had studied every department of theatre production—playwriting, acting, lighting, setting, stage management—in reference to the Craig-Appia-Reinhardt ideal.

When Hume was called to Detroit to take charge of the Arts and Crafts Theatre there, he found the opportunity to test and prove his powers as combined artist and director. The breadth of his work is illuminating as showing what problems the pioneer director of an American art

theatre is likely to meet. In the first place he worked with the architects of the Arts and Crafts building, and effected modifications of the stage plans, which resulted in the creation of one of the best little theatre stages in America. He designed the lighting equipment and supervised its installation; and he designed a permanent adaptable setting, including a modification of the plaster "sky-dome."

In the season's productions he was given full charge of every department of creative work, and while he enjoyed the co-operation of a group of enlightened artists, his word was final in every questioned detail. If he did not choose all the plays, it is at least certain that none was decided upon without his approval. He individually designed most of the settings, and he worked personally with the artists whose names appeared as designers of the others. He worked out every lighting effect. He tried out, and helped to develop by individual training, every actor. And he rehearsed every play, looking after all those matters of movement, gesture and co-ordination of action which, while not noticeable to the audience, are important aids to synthetic effect.

In the historical and romantic productions he left only one creative portion of the work to others. Because certain of his co-workers were

artists as well as expert workers in costume making, he left to them the dressing of the figures, making sure only that the types were right, and the colours in keeping with the settings.

Hume's services to the Arts and Crafts Theatre did not end with complete responsibility behind the curtain. Much of the preliminary work of organization and management, which should be the concern of others in any mature art theatre project, were necessarily left to him—as they probably will be in many another little theatre where a professional director is called to a virgin field. He lectured extensively before schools, clubs and assemblies, and otherwise helped to interest the community in the theatre. And he later arranged other lectures and a teachers' class in an effort to carry the results of the theatre's work to a wider circle.

If the first season at the Arts and Crafts Theatre had accomplished nothing else it still would have been worth while as proving that America has one artist who can be called in to organize and direct a progressive theatre, designing his own stage, if necessary, and then directing a series of productions approaching the best ideals of the art theatre, with expert attention to every creative detail. For Hume has shown himself to be, first, an imaginative artist and inventive innovator, and

second, a born executive and leader of men. He is an example of that type of theatre artist of which America stands in greatest need.

VI

Maurice Browne, the other typical artist-director of America, affords an interesting contrast to Hume; but it is to be noted that his qualifications include the same combination of capacity for leadership with artistic feeling and broad cultural training. But Browne's work has been narrower in a sense. He has preferred to devote his whole career in the theatre to one playhouse, and I think that he feels that his future is definitely bound up with the movement in Chicago. And he maintains the balance of artist and manager less successfully than does Hume. He is more clearly the artist-thinker—certainly more a dreamer—and less a practical director. Just because his aesthetic sense is more acute, his theatre has been concerned more closely (and more successfully) than any other with the pursuit of a typical art-theatre technique—and so has been less related to the community in which it exists. Hume is more of a practical idealist, not only in the sense of combining business sense with artistic insight, but because he is willing to compromise with his public in order to get his idealistic pro-

ject securely started. Maurice Browne, with the artist's dislike of compromise, stuck to his convictions, producing a remarkable array of typical art-theatre plays, but ending in temporary bankruptcy and insecurity.

It is not within my province here to ask which is the better method—of course we want the uncompromising spirit of the one achievement, with the financial success and the community solidarity of the other—but it is at least worth while to point out the two types in contrast. And it is important to note that Maurice Browne, like Hume, insists upon the importance of concentrating the creative functions of stage work in one artist's hands. He insists that this artist must be more than a mere theorist and designer; he must be a workman as well. He must have knowledge, too, of the older theatre, in order that while looking into the future he may keep in touch with the present and avoid the mistakes of the past. I wish to close the chapter with a quotation from an essay which Maurice Browne wrote as a plea for the establishment of an American art theatre:

"The man or woman who would establish an art theatre that is an art theatre and not a pet rabbit fed by hand, must be able to design it, to ventilate it, to decorate it, to equip its stage, to light it (and to handle its lighting himself, or

his electricians will not listen to him), to plan his costumes and scenery, ay, and at a shift to make them with his own hand; otherwise his costumer and scene-painter, if he be fool enough to have one, will do strange things to send him nightmares at dawn and terrify his wife; and in addition to all these things that are essential, he will, if he be a wise man, have the stage-conventions of the last generation at his finger-tips—not merely because some of them are useful and most of them deader than Lazarus and so avoidable with foresight and a good nose . . . but because he is establishing an art theatre, that is to say, imposing a living convention on a dead one, so that it is as well for him to know what the dead one was, and why, for example, Pinero and Sudermann are of it, while von Hoffmansthal and Abercrombie are not. And finally he will know not merely the names of Nijinski and Craig and Fortuny and half a hundred more, but what they have done, and, most important of all, how and why they have done it. And the reason he must know these things, which the millionaire and the pauper dilettante who are dabbling today in the art of the American theatre do not know, is that he is establishing an art theatre which shall be the temple of a living art."

And so the chapter closes. I hope that the

reader will carry in his recollection of it a picture of the artist-director combining qualities of Craig and Reinhardt, Hume and Browne—a new man of the theatre who is at once thinking artist and practical workman, dreamer and executive, machinist and priest of the temple that will be the new theatre.

CHAPTER V

THE QUESTION OF ACTING AND ACTORS

WHEN one surveys the whole field of the American theatre, commercial and progressive, one soon discovers that, next to the problem of artist-directors, the most puzzling question facing the art-theatre group is that of acting and actors. In the departments of playwriting and stagecraft we have at least arrived at a basis of intelligent experimentation, if not at some sort of substantial achievement; but in the matter of acting we are merely in a muddle.

The question is two-fold. First, it is necessary to arrive at some understanding of the distinguishing qualities of art-theatre acting; that is, it is necessary to discover the lasting ideals of acting as an art, and to note the differences, if any, which may be expected to mark off its practice under the synthetic ideal of theatre production. And second, it is pertinent to inquire where the actors for the art theatre are to come from: whether a certain number or all can be

redeemed from the ways of the business theatre—and whether a small minority or perhaps a majority are to come from what are now amateur rather than professional channels.

In the commercial theatre the ideals of acting have been lost; or if any remain, they are those which concern the development (and consequent personal glorification) of the individual actor, and are not such as would contribute to the ensemble effect required in progressive theatres. In the average little theatre, on the other hand, the acting has merely "happened"; and if the insurgent groups have developed an ideal, it has been only that of unconvention—a negatively decent but somewhat barren ideal, which overlooks beauty of speech, distinction of manner and designed group movement. And in those few cases in which amateur and professional have joined hands—the Washington Square Players and the Portmanteau Players are examples—lack of inspired direction has left the companies on a low professional plane: they have exhibited neither the smoothness of action of the first-rate professional company, nor the freshness, the felicitous speech and the team-work which alone can make the amateur superior to the commercial player.

Where, then, should one seek to find models? Clearly, not in America. Only by a study of

the best acting in European theatres, and particularly in those theatres in which rounded-out, balanced production has been made the chief aim, can one discover a sound basis for a theory of the acting of the future.

I

Of the attributes of great acting which have been all but lost to the theatre in the last quarter-century, the most sadly neglected is beauty of speech. In this country the actors have forgotten almost entirely that there is a legitimate appeal to the ear in words musically spoken, and our stage has fallen to a dead level of prosaic and slovenly speech. In voice quality and enunciation the standard set in our theatres is not appreciably superior to that heard in our barber shops or college halls—which is to say that it approaches an ungodly combination of stridency and mumbling. Speech of the sort natural to nine out of ten of the men and women on the American stage can have no place in the scheme of art theatre production.

It is clear how the theatre came to such a degraded standard of speaking. Some decades ago, as an aftermath of the romantic revival, perhaps, the art of acting became a sad caricature of its once beautiful self, through over-accentuation and

an absurd artificiality. Quiet and restrained impersonation was lost in an excess of ranting speech and heroic attitudes. When the naturalistic movement swept the theatre, the artificiality was destroyed, but nothing was invented to take the place of what had once been a legitimate added beauty of the theatre production. Poetry of speech was allowed, so to speak, to pass down and out entirely. The actor jumped from an exaggerated conventionalization to a method which was supposed to be "perfectly natural." But one cannot capture the illusion of the natural by unrelieved, unconventionalized imitation of chance aspects of life—whether in speech or movement or form and colour. Insofar as the actor imitates without betterment the language of the street and the shop, he loses the only thing that can make speech tolerable, not to say lovely, in the theatre.

The first requirement for bringing beauty of speech to the stage is a purely mechanical one: clean enunciation. As a nation we are notorious for our slurring methods of utterance. We do not break our words and phrases cleanly. But that is not a reason for accepting careless speaking in a work of art on the stage. Actors should rather set an example to the nation. In an art theatre, or in one that makes pretension even to

near-art standards, this should be a first test of the actor. Walter Prichard Eaton recently put it up to the little theatres neatly when he wrote: "The rankest amateur ought to be able to pronounce correctly, and enunciate all the syllables of a polysyllabic word without swallowing the penult. If he cannot, he should be politely invited to become a professional and join Mr. Cohan's company. When you enter a little theatre you ought at least to be confident of hearing better speech than in any Broadway production."

The second requirement is partly a matter of physical endowment and partly a matter of training: a musical voice and flexible register. There may be people with "impossible" voices. If so, they should stay off the stage; they are no more fitted to become actors than a one-handed man is fitted to become a pianist. But most voices, if not naturally musical, can be trained so that they are at least passively pleasing; and most of us possess undeveloped tone-registers of which we never even dream. It is the business of schools of acting and studio theatres to develop this quality.

But after all, the potentially musical voice is of small importance if it goes not in company with the third requirement: a feeling for the expressiveness of speech. For otherwise the golden



THE LOST SILK HAT

instrument in the throat will return to dust with its harmonies unawakened.

This matter of feeling is a variable quantity and an elusive quality; but we may be sure that it is never absent from the true actor's make-up. It enables the herald to speak his one line in a manner worthy of his courtly surroundings; and it enables Sarah Bernhardt to ring every change of feeling through the music of her inflection. It is first of all a feeling for the rhythms of speech, for the cadences of the poet's lines; but more than that, it is a reflection and a suggestion of the subtleties and intensities of the emotions that lie hidden behind the action. For words are at best but symbols, and the impression called up depends upon the way of speaking. An inexpressive voice affords but a hard dry shell of meaning, whereas the same words from the lips of a master of speech may call up visions of passion or of calmness, of tenderness or love or sorrow—may afford overtones of feeling otherwise never captured.

These two things, then, we may assuredly demand of the new acting: that in the speaking there shall be a sequence of musical notes, a pattern of sound that will bring a physical delight to the ear; and that the voice modulation

shall reflect a delicate understanding of the emotion and thought underlying the surface play of words.

Poetry of speech is not properly a requirement of poetic productions alone, but should pertain to realistic drama as well. For its beauty is not such that it detracts from interest in the action, but rather is an added loveliness. It is not ornament superimposed, and covering the structural lines, but rather a part of the structure itself, a part necessary to the expression of truth. There are, of course, poetic dramas which lend themselves particularly to musical interpretation, which allow the actor greater latitude in delicate musical intonation. There are even plays which, on account of lack of action, may be termed literary rather than dramatic, and which may still be staged satisfyingly through the appeal of the spoken poetry, for the sake of the sensuous beauty afforded to the ear. Such are several of the plays of Yeats and Dunsany. But even the realistic play can legitimately add the appeal of distinguished speaking. Unbeautiful speech, indeed, has no right place on the stage even of a realistic theatre. An exhibition of commonplaceness there is no more to be condoned than are those so-called naturalistic plays which reveal a photographic segment of sordid life.

II

After the music of speech there is a corresponding requirement of rhythm in the actor's movements. Not only must his gestures be quietly expressive, but there must be a certain grace of bodily action, and a measured fluidity or rhythm in changes from posture to posture. Just as in the use of the voice, there must be overtones of feeling: the face, the hands, the body and limbs must interpret the subtler emotion which are not expressed in the larger actions. For the face when used as a mask, and the body when directed as an instrument of rhythmic expression, can register shades of feeling which are impossible even to the perfectly modulated voice.

In the American theatre there used to be generations of actors who possessed the subtlest powers of expression and distinguished grace of bearing. The older generation in the theatre today has a charm of manner, a dignity of presence, which shames the average player. If this sometimes amounts to a romantic affectation or artificiality, so that we are apt to say disparagingly, "He has the manner of an old actor," it still is no argument for throwing away the principle of beautiful movement. One has only to choose ten young actors and place them beside a typical

representative of the old school, to know that we have lost a real charm from the making of our players of today. For the American stage is slowly being taken over by a generation of actors untrained to the old distinction of bearing, and one that trusts little to delicacy and shading of expression.

We have today a commercial stage peopled by personalities, each trained to parade individual idiosyncrasies or to rely on perfect "naturalness" of movement. For this the little theatre players substitute no training at all. At least they have not spent those years of apprenticeship to experience which are necessary to perfect stage presence. One sometimes wonders whether one-fourth—nay, one-tenth—of the actors blithely appearing on little theatre stages know that there is such a thing as scientific foot-work, or that the best of the older generation went through years of bodily training to gain ease of movement.

Expression on the stage may be partly a matter of natural feeling and intuition, although intellectual understanding and tortuous training have distinct place there too. But grace of bearing, the poetry of movement, can be developed in any one with even an elementary sense of rhythm. The leading two art theatres of Europe, the Moscow Art Theatre and the *Deutsches Thea-*

ter at Berlin, in order to train their actors and students in the art of movement, have established courses in the Dalcroze system of rhythmical dancing. This, it is to be noted, is not in order to develop dancers, but to give players poise and action-control. Regarding the ideas of Jaques-Dalcroze, Huntly Carter has written as follows:

"The inventor has discovered that we all have musical rhythm in us answering to that of the universe, but very few are trained to express it. So he has provided a simple key which any one can apply. He gives his pupils a quantity of musical notes, and leaves each pupil free to compose his or her own musical movements. In this view, every movement we make should and could be equivalent to a note of music, and, given the right note, there will be an harmonious response. If we are trained to realize these notes with the aid of music, soon we come to realize them automatically without its aid. Thus we may, if we like, learn to move through life in compositions in which spontaneous melody and rhythm, and not mechanical, logical, or meaningless actions, are the essentials."

It is perhaps too much to ask that any great number of Americans shall soon "learn to move through life" with anything approaching "spontaneous melody and rhythm." But we have the

right at least to ask that our dramatic schools—and art theatres, when they come—shall train actors in the principles of some such system as Jaques-Dalcroze has invented.

Beyond the matter of individual action, which is summed up in expression, gesture, and personal bearing, there is a wider group action, a designed relationship between player and player, which is too seldom practised intelligently in the American theatre. This is due partly to the scramble for the centre of the stage, on the part of the "big" actors, and partly to the filling in of minor parts with mere "support," so that certain characters are played up continually, while others do their work either perfunctorily or inexpertly; but it is due chiefly to the lack of directors with sufficient artistic knowledge to make the play a concert of movement. The group-playing of the Irish Players comes to mind as an excellent example of unpretentious but intelligent related acting. Without emphasizing personalities, they always managed to throw the speaker into relief, the other actors falling into a background necessary to the picture but never interrupting the main motive; and there was about their stage groupings a gratifying smoothness, almost a fluidity of movement. In certain poetic productions, and particularly in those which rely upon

the appeal to the eye as much as the appeal to the ear, it is possible to keep the grouping almost constantly in the realm of pictorial design. Maurice Browne is a genius in the application of the principles of pictorial composition to stage arrangement, and in several of his productions the figures have been so disposed that the eye was enchanted by a continual series of charmingly composed pictures. Such grouping can be overdone, to the harm of the spiritual content of the drama—but so far it has been radically underdone on the American stage.

III

Having arrived at some understanding of the elementary ideals of acting, having discovered what things have been lost out of the art through its commercialization, one may ask how the acting at a typical art theatre may be expected to differ from that at any commercial theatre which may also raise its standard to include musical speaking, expressive and pleasing action, and intelligent group-playing. In the first place there will be a quietness of tone pervading the art theatre in the playing as in every other department of production. For this is to be the temple of the highest art, and high art is always marked by reticence and a reverential rather than a for-

ward spirit. This quieter method of acting, moreover, will be the means of bringing a truer balance, of giving the wider dramatic meaning fuller scope for expression. William Butler Yeats, who has been particularly concerned with methods which would do justice to poetry spoken on the stage, once wrote in praise of the acting of the Irish Players: "It was the first performance I had seen, since I understood these things, in which the actors kept still enough to give poetical writing its full effect upon the stage." From practically all the European theatres in which the art-theatre ideal has been sought, critics report that the acting has been marked by a combination of quietness and distinction. Just as, under the synthetic ideal, the setting must be unobtrusive enough to avoid interference with the action, and the lighting modified to harmonize with the mood of the drama, so the acting must avoid the flamboyant and the noisy, in order that the soul of the play may shine through unobscured by a too-compelling "bit" on the actor's part.

The star system will have no place in art theatre organization. In any production which has a purpose more serious than playing up a darling of the managers and the public, it is necessary that a balance of parts be maintained, that the

emphasis be put not on one figure, with mere fillers to complete the picture, but on the ensemble.

The implication of the star system is, moreover, that it is the acting, and not the play as produced, that counts most. At least the system has so worked out in America, where the commercial exploitation of stars has had its most deplorable effects on playwriting. But a somewhat paradoxical result is noticeable: while the system began by exalting the art of acting at the expense of the other arts of the theatre, it ended by destroying that art with the others. The big fellows among the actors, through being raised above the other artists of the playhouse, lost their perspective and failed to preserve the true relationship between the contributive arts, and so failed to grow bigger. And the little fellows tried to imitate the big fellows, and so fell into a mess of trickery, instead of developing their own native talents on a firm foundation. The temptation to create stars, moreover, was so great that certain managers began to push up actors who, through prettiness or some other personal charm, were likely to catch the public eye, but who were lacking in the thorough training and depth of feeling necessary to make them truly great. A false standard was thus created, which has re-

sulted in personality becoming the curse of modern acting.

This fallacy which lifts personality above powers of impersonation must be combated by the art theatres. It is true that the actor usually lends additional colour to his rôle through personal distinction, through beauty, or strength or grace of manner. But it is nevertheless true that he must subordinate his own individuality to that of the character played. If he happens to possess the charm of a John Drew he should not substitute the charming John Drew for the character the playwright intended, for that character was probably meant to be charming in a different way; and he should not order plays specially designed to display his charm.

It is, indeed, the duty of the actor to sink his own personality, his feelings, the little personal ways that endear him to his friends, even his attractive appearance, in an illusion of some one else. He must forget himself entirely. In so saying, I do not mean that he should substitute emotional for intellectual control, for I believe firmly that the best acting arrives by design and is absolutely controlled by the intelligence. But he must forget his individuality, he must renounce personal ambition in ambition for the whole play, he must assume the disinterested-

ness which marks the great creative figure in any art.

But more than this, he must in the art theatre submit to direction. If his conception of a part differs from that of the director (as seldom will happen if he has in mind the higher ideal of the play's success), he must be obedient to the latter's decision. For we have seen that true art-theatre production is premised on a collective ideal, and on complete control by the guiding genius of an artist-director. This submission to authority does not mean surrender of the player's interpretative function; it means only that he must be concerned with the interpretation of the play first, and with his individual work after that. He may be just as great an artist under the director's guidance; indeed, he is likely to appear greater because he will be in perfect harmony with his surroundings. He is usually as free to interpret creatively as he is under the go-as-you-please system now in vogue in the American theatre. He merely promises that he will keep his work within such limits that it will not upset the other elements of the production or clash with the work of the other actors. And these limits are set by an artist instead of a businessman or a businessman's stage-manager. The actor is left free to think out the character-

ization, and there is no limit to the subtlety or intensity which he may display in its playing, so long as he does not arrogate to himself functions that properly belong elsewhere. The scope for individual technique is as great as before, but within the limits of harmony with his fellows.

IV

In European countries it is possible to find actors with such thorough training in speaking and with such grace of bearing that the development of an art theatre company may be a matter of months rather than years. Even in England, where the actor-manager system has interfered with the development of companies devoted to the ideal of ensemble acting, the standard of speech is gratefully high, and infinitely better than that prevailing on the American stage. But on this side of the Atlantic the question of procuring a satisfactory company for a professional art theatre is exceedingly puzzling.

It is probable, of course, that we shall not have for several years an art theatre of high professional standing: that is, we shall not have playhouses and companies that will bear the relationship to our business theatres which the *Deutsches Theater* and the Munich Art Theatre, for instance, bear to the commercial theatres of Ger-

many. But if the other factors necessary to the establishment of such a theatre in an American city should become immediately available, where should we turn for the actors? By paying an exorbitant price for the very best people in the commercial theatre, it might be possible to form one or even two satisfying American companies—but the price would probably be so high that immediate bankruptcy would result. Except for this high-priced, very small minority, there would be practically no native actors equal to the demands of such an institution. The average American player not only lacks the required artistic training and cultural background, but would have absolutely no sympathetic understanding of the ideals and aims of an art theatre.

The likely alternative, in case of an early establishment of art theatres, would be the selection of a company of British actors. Moderately talented English players, with real distinction of voice and bearing, could be employed for moderate prices.[1] And since, unlike our American product, they would probably be educated ladies and gentlemen, they could within a season or two

[1] For many years Winthrop Ames, who understands the qualities of good acting better than any other commercial manager, has been importing English actors for his productions.

be trained to the peculiar requirements of the art-theatre play.

V

The full-fledged professional art theatre, however, is not likely to materialize immediately. It is much more probable that each city will have its preliminary experiment in the direction of such an institution. The first step is that which many cities are taking now—San Francisco, Denver, Rochester, St. Louis, are examples—the establishment of little theatres, amateur in acting and stage setting, under directors who are either amateurs or professionals of the old school. In the result attained these are not often notably better than the old-time aimless social-dramatic club. But usually they have seen some glimmering of the synthetic ideal; and in choice of plays and in stagecraft they are usually progressive. The second step is that which has been accomplished at Chicago and at Detroit, and by the Washington Square Players in New York: a lifting of the experimental ideal to a definite search for an art-theatre type of play and technique of production. These theatres have been stabilized to a certain extent, and there has been a definite and intelligent effort to professionalize them while retaining the best of the valuable amateur ideals.

After such theatres we may expect to see various stages in the professionalizing process, until we ultimately arrive at the ideal of the European art theatre.

The most important question at the present stage, the question facing every little theatre that looks forward to an achievement such as that at Chicago or Detroit, is this: is it better to use amateur or professional actors? The Washington Square Players have chosen to call themselves professionals, and they have gathered into their company many players who have had experience on the commercial stage. The results do not argue eloquently for the system: the acting has been a notably weak link in the Washington Square achievement—it has had neither the freshness of good amateur work nor the ease and finish of the best professional playing. The Portmanteau Players, who have tried to attain certain of the art-theatre ideals with a group of young players chosen from the commercial theatre, have been equally unsuccessful in attaining ensemble acting in perfect harmony with the spirit of the play.

The argument for the other side I wish to take from Sam Hume, who has had experience in production under both systems. At the Arts and Crafts Theatre he has had only amateurs in his

company, with results that compare favourably with the work of the Washington Square Players and the Portmanteau Players. Certainly the acting has been no more ragged in general, and in the directions of speaking poetic lines musically and creating group-harmony it has been superior. Hume's summary of the situation runs like this: At the present stage of the art theatre movement we are limited, by the small audiences so far developed for the best forms of drama, and by certain exterior circumstances, to a small expenditure each year. If a little theatre pays actors' salaries it cannot do justice to the other demands of art theatre production. The class of actor it can afford to pay, moreover, is not able to do as good work as the best type of amateur. It is unwise to pay a few "leading" actors and then fill in with amateurs, because one thereby creates an undemocratic atmosphere and a basis for petty jealousies and disputes. It is better, therefore, to use only amateurs, at least until such time as the theatre can afford the very best professionals. A paid company, moreover, is necessarily small, and one can choose from a much wider field when using amateurs.

The advantages of amateur companies have been brought out clearly during Hume's season at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. In the first



SAM HUME AS ABRAHAM AND
FRANCES LOUGHTON AS ISAAC

place they submit more willingly to direction; they have not the professional actor's obsession that the old method is right, and they conform to the ensemble method more easily. They are free, moreover, from those artificialities and tricks which mark the commercial theatre player, and which the art theatre director must cure before starting serious work. They are working for love of the theatre, and not for pay; and their acting is therefore less likely to be perfunctory. They are as a class far better educated and better bred than the usual actor, and so they more easily grasp the essential idea of art theatre production. It is necessary to add that in most amateur companies there is a sprinkling of players with more or less professional experience. At Detroit certain ones had been with travelling and stock companies, others had played bits here and there, and many, of course, had been leaders in amateur dramatic clubs. In other words, the average player in such a company as that at the Arts and Crafts Theatre does not come to the director as raw material. If he needs an actor with the professional trick, to "carry" a scene, one is at hand; and if he wants the sincerity, the fresh charm and the intelligence of amateurs with a stage sense, he is likely to be over-supplied. In every American city there is this two-fold source:

first, a group of intelligent, if untrained, amateurs who at least have a feeling for stage work; and second, a group of men and women with professional experience, who have left the stage to marry and settle down, or because they found life in the commercial theatre uncongenial.

Perhaps the weightiest argument against the use of amateur players is in the lack of directors who combine a knowledge of the art of acting with an understanding of the newer ideals of staging. For unless the actors are trained by some one with ability as an artist and with long experience of the stage, they either remain patently untrained or else become poor manipulators of the professional's bag of tricks. The other serious argument against unpaid amateur players is that they cannot be depended upon for continuous work throughout the season. Family, business and social obligations may call them from the theatre at critical moments. There is also a reasonable limit to the number of performances they can be asked to give in any one month, thus limiting the theatre to peripatetic productions. By casting plays with one group the first month and utilizing a different group the second, and alternating as necessary, a regular schedule of say one week's productions each month can be counted on. But the fact remains that it will be

impossible to take the final step toward the establishment of an art theatre playing a continuous season without adopting a system under which actors are paid. On the other hand it is well to remember that practically all the progressive theatres in Europe started with scattered performances.

Just here it is necessary to enquire what distinguishes amateur actors from professionals. The original connotation of the word "amateur," of one who loves his work, must not be overlooked. The true amateur of the theatre is the man or woman who acts for love of the art, and not primarily as a means of support. There can be no hard and fast line drawn, with the amateurs grouped on one side because they do not receive pay, and the professionals on the other because they are financially reimbursed for their appearances. It is rather a matter of the spirit in which one approaches the work. To my mind the Chicago Little Theatre company is distinctly amateur —I say so in praise and not in disparagement. Despite the fact that the players receive a small wage, they are held together primarily by a passion for the art of the theatre. There is no temptation for them to become mere time-servers, for them to stoop to the commercial-professional's vice of learning the tricks that will bring the

most money. They have passed the early stages of amateurism, so that their work for a cause is both recognized and stabilized by the payment of a small monetary return; they are on the road to the best sort of professionalism, in which service to art is rewarded by a reasonable means to living. But they remain amateurs in spirit.

In paying his players Maurice Browne has avoided, as no other little theatre director has, the disadvantages implied in Sam Hume's theory that a progressive theatre can obtain better results with the best unpaid amateurs than with the sort of professional it can afford to employ. Browne has accomplished this because, when he was able to pay, he did not turn to the professional market, but continued with his amateurs. While he has not built up a company that is ideal according to art theatre standards, he has made such progress in attaining co-ordination and unity of mood in acting that his opinion concerning amateurs is worth quoting. Four years ago he wrote: "Professional actors and actresses, all of them incidentally once amateurs themselves, are carefully trained in certain stage-conventions, which after a time become second nature to them; these conventions are different from the new stage conventions which the leaders of the Art Theatre movement are inventing, and therefore those

trained in them are not directly helpful to such leaders, just as a man trained in classics is not directly helpful to a bridge builder; their uses are different. And, just as a bridge builder would sooner have for pupil a boy without any training than a boy with a training alien to his own, so the director of an Art Theatre prefers to have players without any training (i.e., amateurs) than players trained in an alien convention. Moreover, the professional, so-called, in any walk of life, usually works primarily for money, while the amateur, so-called, that is to say the volunteer, works primarily for love of the work."

It is well to remind ourselves just here that both the theatre of the Irish Players and the Moscow Art Theatre had their beginnings in amateur organizations. It seems likely that our American art theatres will grow from the same foundation —that Hume and Browne with their amateur players will rear institutions more lasting and more important than those initiated by such well-meaning reformers as the founders of the New Theatre in New York. It is probable, further, that such an early abandonment of the amateur basis as that effected by the Washington Square Players will prove exceedingly unwise. It necessarily entails surrender to many stultifying conventions of the commercial theatre. The ama-

teur spirit, love of the art, will be the foundation rock of the new edifice; and players steeped in a tradition alien to that spirit can have little part in the building. As the typical art theatre company develops its own sort of professionalism, there will be a certain accretion of players from commercial ranks—from that small minority who are dissatisfied with the actor's low estate under the business system. But the spirit of the organization will take rise in the qualities and perceptions of those of its members who preserve the amateur feeling.

VI

Of the position of the actor under the ultimate art theatre I shall have something to say in a later chapter. But here I wish to point out two facts: the degradation from the position of artist to the position of a shopkeeper with a line of shop-worn goods to sell has resulted from an organization under which the actor was relieved of responsibility and deprived of direct interest in his company's doings; and second, the loss of the best traditions of his art was due to the long-run and circuit systems, under which the player was denied opportunity to play varied rôles, and the leisure and incentive necessary to make him a student in the broader sense. These faults will

be corrected in the art theatre, where the actor will again become a co-operative partner, if not in ownership, at least in the artistic administration of the theatre. He will be employed under annual contract, with certain pension rights and proprietary interests accruing with added years of service. The theatre will be his in a very true sense, and it will secure to him those advantages of permanency, of breadth of opportunity, and of balance of work and recreation, which are necessary to his finest development.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUESTION OF PLAYS

THE typical art theatre play differs signally from the typical play of the commercial theatre. The distinction is the same, perhaps, as that which divides literature from journalism. Broadway is concerned with a journalistic product—direct, obviously appealing, sensational, ephemeral. The art theatres are, or will be, devoted primarily to something subtler and more specialized in its appeal. To define this higher type of drama would be to define art—which generations of scholars have failed to do clearly and simply. It has to do, of course, with beauty, truth, seriousness. Beyond that I must leave each reader free to form his own exact boundaries between the drama of the art theatre and the merely amusing or shocking or topical play.

I

Just as the newspapers and cheap magazines occasionally publish poems or stories or essays characterized by real literary value, so the busi-

ness theatres occasionally mount plays which belong in the art-theatre group. Perhaps it is true that the really great play, beautifully staged, will interest both audiences. But as a rule Broadway plays run true to the journalistic type. And as a rule the advanced art theatres tend to a type of production that appeals to a comparative few —because we are not yet a cultured nation. The question then arises: shall the American embryo art theatres immediately set up an advanced ideal of play which will cut them off from the patronage of any but a very small audience? Or shall they compromise by mixing the journalistic product with occasional attempts at the deeply artistic? Or shall they adopt a standard of play that finds its level where the two sorts meet—never too "advanced" and never too clearly vulgar? In short, where, between the art ideal and the amusement ideal, shall the average little theatre that aspires to be an art theatre set its standard?

There are those who refuse to compromise. But for most of us who have been in the fight it has become clear that, if we would exist at all, if we object to going out of existence until such time as an inspired millionaire is willing to stake us to pursue the higher ideal, audience or no audience, we must recognize that there are two goals:

one the immediate establishment of theatres that are progressive enough in choice of plays and methods of staging to be clearly steps beyond the commercial average and toward a higher ideal; and the other an ultimate ideal of absolute art, with no concession to popular demand.

II

Sam Hume, in explaining the success of the first season at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, lays great stress on the fact that he fitted the series of plays to the demands of the community. His point of view is interesting, particularly in light of several failures that have occurred in the little theatre world during the season. "We were dependent," he says, "on a certain group of theatre-goers for our existence. We were careful, therefore, not to hit over the heads of that group. It happened to be an unusually intelligent class, but it was not interested in the esoteric and precious material which certain little theatres affect. We were able to choose dignified, worth-while plays, and we tried to produce them according to the best ideals of staging. But we avoided plays of very limited appeal. We made good because we did not keep too far ahead of our audiences, because we did not try unduly to force the movement for better art in the theatre."

An analysis of the season's bills at the Arts and Crafts Theatre shows that only six of the nineteen plays produced were at all unusual or specialized in appeal. One of these appeared on each of the six programs of the season—which indicates that when Hume wished to try something a little "advanced" on his audiences, he sandwiched it between things of more obvious appeal. While trying to educate his community to a taste for something different from the current fare of the commercial theatre, he stayed close enough to that in general so that the audiences would not be driven away by the strangeness of his offerings.

The one long play presented during the season, and the production subjected to the most serious criticism from both within and without the organization, was "The Chinese Lantern," by Lawrence Housman. This poetic work proved not to have enough literary appeal to compensate for the lack of action. Lord Dunsany's "The Tents of the Arabs," on the other hand, with the beauty of the lines fully brought out through Hume's careful training of the actors, proved that poetry can redeem a play lacking in gripping action and appealing story. But even here a cleavage in the audience was immediately apparent. Most of the spectators, be it said in praise, were delighted

with the beauty of the play; but the others, missing the appeal of obvious sentiment, emotion and excitement, and untrained in appreciation of spoken poetry, found the production dull.

The theatre's nearest approach to the esoteric came in the productions of Maeterlinck's "The Intruder" and Dunsany's "The Glittering Gate." In the former Hume succeeded, with the aid of an admirable cast, in attaining and sustaining the mood of unnatural calm and brooding mystery which is the very spirit of the play; and in the other he achieved the necessary tension and a sense of detachment from the world.

These two plays created the widest diversity of feeling and opinion, some adjudging them the high points of the season, and others finding them tedious and senseless. But there can be no doubt that in presenting them the theatre was registering most clearly its advance over the average: it was providing, for those who cared, a type of production never seen in the commercial theatres; and it was presenting to the others a sort of play which, even under protest, was likely to aid ultimately in broadening their field of appreciation.

The two greatest novelties of the series were the old English religious play "Abraham and Isaac," and "The Romance of the Rose," a ro-

mantic pantomime devised by Sam Hume, with music by Timothy M. Spelman 2nd.

For the rest, the season might have been planned almost entirely in reference to an ideal of entertainment untroubled by a desire for art. The only classic revived was a sure-fire farce of Molière, "A Doctor in Spite of Himself," and the other revival, "The Revesby Sword Play," was hardly more than a divertisement in folk dancing. The poetic trend was continued, in a way, in Kenneth Sawyer Goodman's two slight fantasies, "The Wonder Hat" and "Ephraim and the Winged Bear." Of the plays tending toward serious realism only Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" rose above the ordinary, both "The Bank Account" and "The Last Man In" being effective examples of "the play with a punch," without notable literary value or serious character-study. Of plays of lighter type the choice ranged from such excellent artificial farce-comedy as Dunsany's "The Lost Silk Hat" and Hankin's "The Constant Lovers," through the more satirical "Suppressed Desires," to such pleasant foolishness as "Helena's Husband."

As a whole it is not a list that would do credit to a mature art theatre. Plays of a passing vogue or distinctly light in appeal are in the majority. On the other hand, it is a list that bespeaks a

clear advance beyond the standards of the commercial theatre. It is a working illustration of Hume's theory: keep ahead of business standards, but never go so far into untried fields or toward the art of particularized appeal, that the audiences of the moment will be antagonized.

III

Considered by no other standard than the type of play produced, the Chicago Little Theatre is incomparably the closest American approach to an art theatre. Its productions have come measurably near the art that appeals to a highly cultivated audience, to the sort of audience that already exists in large numbers in certain parts of Europe, but which has yet to be developed in most American cities. An analysis of its list of plays shows that Maurice Browne has preferred to strike direct to the ultimate goal as he has seen it. He refused to compromise for the sake of conciliating audiences or critics.

The list of productions at Chicago is far more impressive than that of the Arts and Crafts Theatre. In the five seasons since its founding the proportion of poetic and fantastic plays has not been considerably greater than at Detroit. But the selection has been more revolutionary, including such names as Euripides (in Gilbert



LONESOMELIKE

Murray's remarkable translations), Yeats, and Synge; and original productions of plays by American authors have been made with the particular object of finding a typical art-theatre type of play. In the non-poetic or less poetic groups, moreover, the Chicago Little Theatre list tends far more to the serious, is freer from mere "fillers" than is the Detroit list. Ibsen, Shaw, Schnitzler, Hankin, Strindberg, Gibson, Wilde—these are names which, although they tend too much to unrelieved realism to suit some of us, nevertheless bespeak a preoccupation with what is too dignified, too thoughtful and too true to form part of the average theatre's repertory.

It would be idle to claim that devotion to a theory does not beget certain advantages artistically. One must admire any artist who sets up an ideal, and then, although realizing that it is far beyond the public, pursues it uncompromisingly, in the face of public apathy, and in spite of criticism both fair and unfair. And there are definite advantages to the particular theatre and to the art theatre movement in general. Thus the Chicago Little Theatre will always be known as a pioneer in the search for a characteristic art-theatre technique. It aided the whole movement through its pioneering activities and it gained a lasting distinction thereby.

But there are disadvantages, too, and these are such that they make one wonder whether the shortest route to the ideal is not through a more gradual progress—whether Hume is not right in the assertion that we must speak at first in a language which sizable audiences can understand, and then develop the community with the theatre as the artistic standards are raised. The Chicago Little Theatre has gained a reputation for a greatly restricted appeal; it is known as a theatre for a specialized audience, if not for a cult, and this has militated against its wider activity as a community venture; and it would doubtless tend to prevent Maurice Browne from obtaining the directorship of a municipal theatre if the Chicago millionaires or voters were ready to build one—although he would be the logical man, if the theatre were designed to be an art institution. Thus does unbending devotion to an ideal tend to estrange an artist or an institution from the public.

But there is a more serious practical lesson to be learned from the Chicago Little Theatre's five years' experience. It is that typical art-theatre plays of the advanced type are likely to lead to financial ruin. There has been an unwholesome air of financial insecurity about the Chicago project, which is to be laid partially to the failure

to choose plays which, while not stooping to commercial standards, would at least tend to conciliate the spectators. To put it rawly, the Chicago Little Theatre has been too artistic to succeed financially at our present stage of culture.

IV

My own opinion is that neither one of these theatres has taken the wisest course. While I have no faith in the usual interpretation of the adage that "the play must please the public," I do believe that the whole art of the theatre is to a certain extent conditioned on public acceptance. But I believe that it is the duty of the art theatre to keep ahead of its audiences. To please any audience, even the most intelligent, all the time, would be narrowing and deadening. And to please continuously even the best audiences to be gathered in the average American city today would mean artistic suicide. It seems to me that the standard at the Arts and Crafts Theatre during its first season was set too close to what would please the average. The Chicago list, on the other hand, gratifying as it must be to the forward-looking artist and to the man who sees progress in experiment, shows too ruthless a disregard for public—even intelligent—preferences. It should be possible to make the majority of pro-

ductions touch the standard set by the best things done at the Arts and Crafts Theatre—there were some that pleased the audiences and bore the unmistakable marks of serious art; and beyond that majority there should be regular excursions into those regions in which we hope ultimately to make our audiences at home, but which are now *caviare* to the general. I insist the more strongly on the necessity of keeping somewhat in advance of the audience, with just enough concession to hold the most intelligent audience, because this slight compromise has not been tried. Always there has been refusal to recede at all from the high-art plane, or else there has been too decided a lowering of standards.

V

When one turns away from consideration of the practical ideal of the existing progressive theatres to the question of the types of play to be seen in the ultimate mature art theatre, one finds even more puzzling difficulties. We have never had repertory art theatres, nor any sort of institutions faintly suggesting the dignified subventioned theatres of France and Germany, and we must learn entirely by experience just what plays are available.

The one outstanding fact about such a theatre,

however, is that it must be catholic in its choice of drama. The stereotyped formulas adopted by Broadway managers in judging plays have been one of the curses of the commercial system. And one recollects that even the Comédie Française has been too narrowly national to serve the best interests of French dramatic art. Variety is absolutely necessary to make the activity of an art theatre vital in its reactions on the community and on native art. A repertory should without doubt include classic and modern drama, the work of both foreign and native dramatists, and both poetic and realistic plays.

As to the classics, one must remember that in the last decade or two they have practically never been adequately presented in America. They have been produced occasionally as cut to fit a Broadway star, and smothered with spectacular Broadway scenery; and they have been revived more intelligently, but amateurishly and archaeologically, at the colleges. But the classics in their best form have been practically unknown in this country. To say that the public will not patronize them is the merest speculation. The public has had no chance to judge. Under art-theatre treatment, with the poetry brought out, and with dramatic story, acting and setting properly interrelated, they can be made to live again for modern

audiences. Margaret Anglin's company and the Chicago Little Theatre have made a great advance in their productions of the Greek tragedies: they have at least shown that when artists take up the plays their tragic splendour and trenchant emotion will register with American audiences as with those of ancient Athens. And when William Poel took one of the least interesting of Elizabethan comedies, and made it appeal to American audiences merely by his *manner* of production—which he claimed was the Elizabethan manner—he convinced many progressives that if the public does not like classics, it is the method of staging that is at fault.

Shakespeare and the other Elizabethan dramatists are as much the classics of the American theatre as Molière, Corneille and Racine are of the French. And so the American art theatre will most often turn to Shakespeare and his contemporaries for their revivals. But the best things from the French, German, Spanish and other languages will find place also, if we are wise. And if the audiences are not enthusiastic at first, they will be increasingly so, later. In drama, as in music, one's taste improves with experience of the best. Appreciation follows opportunity.

Of modern plays it is difficult to say that any

type beyond melodrama and farce should be excluded. The sort of farce that brings only idle laughter, without any element of satire or any impulse to thoughtful amusement, is beyond the bounds of art; and so is sheer melodrama. One might add that the play of pure propaganda would also be out of place in the art theatre. But who is to say where the emotionally effective and artistically legitimate drama of thought is to be divided from the propaganda play? And who is to mark the boundary between mere naturalism and inspired realism?

Some people think that it is possible to divide drama into two classes, the play of beauty and the play of ideas; and they would have the art theatre concerned only with the play of beauty. They would put the whole realistic school, including Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, Schnitzler, and many another, outside the pale. The question is not so easy of solution.

There is no doubt that a general distinction can be made between a substantially poetic group of dramatists and a typically realistic group; the one relies chiefly on imaginative and literary appeal, while the other, through its intensive observation of life, brings a deep emotional reaction coupled with a stimulus to thought. And there can be no doubt that to keep a wholesome balance

we must have a great deal more of poetic drama than the business theatre has offered. American theatre-goers have been starved for imaginative drama for years. But we are already swinging back to the poetic. (I saw seven Dunsany plays produced last winter.) This type of play, moreover, lends itself better to art-theatre technique than any other. Yeats, Synge, Dunsany, Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, D'Annunzio—these are names which are likely to have large place in art theatre repertories, certainly infinitely larger than any Broadway manager would grant possible. Poetry is, indeed, coming to its own on the stage.

On the other hand, no art theatre could today afford to cut itself off from all that the realistic movement has brought to the theatre. Even though I believe that the highest forms of art come from the regions of the imaginative, the poetic and the sensuously beautiful, I for one am not ready to say that the realistic dramatists are to be barred by organizations actuated solely by the desire for better theatre art. The aesthetic senses lie so close to the emotions and the intellect that we are likely to re-act to an idea-play of Ibsen or Galsworthy much as we re-act to Greek tragedy. And for most of us ideas are among the most interesting and important things in life. So I would

open the art theatre even to the intellectual drama of Shaw and Barker;[1] and after that would come the more emotional type, where the idea is more leavened with dramatic story—the drama, for instance, of Galsworthy, of Tolstoy, and of Brieux when he is least pathological and most himself.

VI

One other important consideration must enter into the choice of plays: the proportion of native to foreign works. Just as in the matter of classics, the list should be open to the widest possible selection from the contemporary drama of other countries. The best should be taken from European dramatists, not only because for some years to come their best is likely to be better than our best, but also because we need to study their drama for an understanding of those universal principles which will some day underlie our own. Just here it is well to remind ourselves that the most intensely national drama of modern times, the Irish, found its finest expression in the works of two men of international culture and training.

[1] Four years ago I wrote that "Getting Married" was distinctly a play for reading and not for the stage, and that Barker's "The Madras House" was undramatic. My final conversion came last winter when I saw in one week the productions of "Getting Married" and Bahr's "The Master." Now I am so far won over that I want to see "The Madras House" staged.

Yeats began his dramatic career in London, and knew well both the English and the French theatres before he became interested in the project at Dublin; and Synge had spent many years on the Continent previous to his connection with the Irish National Theatre. An understanding internationalism is the soundest basis for an inspiring nationalism, in art as in politics.

But while opening our theatres so freely to foreign artists, we must remember that the development of American drama depends largely upon the encouragement offered native playwrights. We have seen how the commercialization of the playhouse deprived the aspiring playwright of all laboratory facilities. While we cannot afford to lower art-theatre standards to those of the new laboratory theatres, such as that of the Provincetown Players, we must recognize that every schedule of productions should make room for a certain number of native pieces. The knowledge that such theatres await plays of merit will spur dramatists to do a serious sort of work, which would never be called forth by the demands of the business playhouse. The Abbey Theatre so inspired a generation of Irish writers that an entire new dramatic literature resulted.

It is not probable that we shall have a national drama in the Irish sense, or even in the French

sense. As a federated group-nation, without a single art capital—New York is hardly more than a centre of business art—we cannot expect to have the intense national feeling which would bring forth a deeply characteristic body of drama. It is more likely that we shall have a sectional drama, of New England, of the Middle West, of the Far West, and this collectively may have a definite note which can be recognized as American. If so, it is even more imperative that the sectional art theatres provide the native playwright with facilities for staging really meritorious work.

The Arts and Crafts Theatre in its first season staged only one play by a Michigan author, and only eight of its nineteen plays were American. The record shows too little interest in the development of a local or national drama. The Chicago Little Theatre likewise has been concerned a little too exclusively with foreign plays. The average maintained by the Washington Square Players has been much better. In the preface to "Washington Square Plays" Edward Goodman writes: "So far [1916] we have produced thirty-two plays, of one-act and greater length, and of these twenty have been American. The emphasis of our interest has been on the American playwright."

I realize fully that the really good drama by an American is rare; and that in the field of the one-act play especially there are many more satisfying examples to be drawn from English and foreign repertories. But I want just a little prejudice for the native playwright at this stage of development, a tendency to put his fairly good play on the boards in preference to a foreign work that is just a little better. Through his experience of the stage this time he is likely to equal his European rival next time.

I believe that the development of a large body of important American drama is only a matter of time. Already we have material not unworthy of an art theatre's repertory. One might start the list with a few works which no one would challenge, such as "The Yellow Jacket" and "The Poor Little Rich Girl." Then there are many plays which, while doubtless subject to minority objection, are well worthy of revival—poetic works like Percy MacKaye's "The Scarecrow" and Mrs. Marks' "The Piper," and more realistic plays like Charles Kenyon's "Kindling" and Augustus Thomas' "As a Man Thinks." Of course one must add "The Great Divide," and if sheer realism is not debarred, there is "The Easiest Way." But I have more faith in the importance of dramas to be written by such outsid-

ers as Susan Glaspell, Theodore Dreiser and Cloyd Head.

VII

The American art theatre will, of course, be a repertory theatre. It will doubtless modify the repertory plan of such institutions as the Comédie Française, retaining a certain latitude in the length of run of a successful new play. Its economic position may be such that it will have to keep an occasional success on the boards for several weeks. But it should never offer less than a certain scheduled number of plays in a season; and it must gradually build up a group of plays for revival, covering classic and modern. Only thus can it fulfil its true function as an institution serving a community in relation to theatre art as the art gallery serves it in relation to painting and sculpture. Repertory organization brings its serious problems, particularly where there is competition with the commercial long-run system. But only through its advantages, its method of conserving the best plays out of the theatres of the past and present, can we hope to combat effectively the narrowing influence of the business theatre.

CHAPTER VII

THE QUESTION OF STAGE SETTINGS

BECAUSE the art-theatre ideal demands that every element that goes to make up a production shall contribute to the creation of a single mood, it is necessary that the older methods of stage setting—which are still the methods of most commercial theatres—be discarded. The grossly unnatural, the literal, and the spectacular modes of scene-building must give way before a stagecraft which finds its foundation principles in the synthetic ideal: a stagecraft which is marked by the most typical characteristics of the new art of the theatre—suggestion, imaginative invention, atmospheric beauty, subordination of specific interest to creation of mood.

It happens that in the one direction of stage decoration the American progressive theatres have made more progress than in any other; they are already in possession of a fair understanding of the principles of the new staging, and they have developed a considerable amount of

talent of art-theatre calibre. America has no stage artists of the measure of Craig or Appia, nor any whose lustre would not be dimmed beside half a dozen of the Germans and Russians; but six or eight may fairly be termed enlightened exponents of art-theatre methods, and dependable craftsmen in the new field.

I

The older style of stage setting was based on a literal transcription into paint, canvas and properties of certain facts set down in a playwright's stage directions. If doors were called for, doors were cut in walls, but with little regard for scale or for proportion of wall space to openings; and windows, mantels and other accessories were supplied as a builder might supply them without an architect's help. The result usually was architecturally and materially correct. If the designer wished to add something by way of decoration it was entirely in the nature of ornament stuck on. In other words, the designer of stage settings never made his scene spiritually true to the inner mood of the play, but only materially true to its practical demands; he seldom made it structurally decorative, but only built up something spectacular and decorative from his own standpoint, and not at all related to the spirit-

ual content of the drama. The methods used, moreover, were absurdly artificial. Supposedly wooden walls quaked at the slightest touch, broad landscapes wrinkled in the breeze, ships cast grotesque shadows on the sky, furniture was even painted on the walls, and the woodwork had painted lights and shadows that never matched the surrounding real light and shade. These and similar crudities were accepted as necessary accompaniments of the art of stage setting. It was not the artificiality of art—the conventionalized symbol taking the place of the real—but the artificiality of incompetence, which an amiable public accepted because it could not help itself.

The staging of a generation ago was so very bad that even some of the American managers revolted against it. David Belasco, with his passion for thoroughness, was particularly instrumental in giving a certain substantial illusion to the box-set interior, and eliminating the most grossly artificial features from exteriors. But this revolt was solely in the direction of naturalism. It did not start with the desire to bring the setting into closer harmony with the spirit of the play, but only with the object of making the scene more natural. It removed the worst absurdities of Nineteenth Century staging; but in its later elaboration it provided distractions quite as for-

eign to the substance of the drama. In the pursuit of the natural, Belasco and others began to build scenes so finely imitative, so true to the surface appearances of life, that the audience forgot the play in wonder at the photographic perfection of the setting.

The revolt of the artists, beginning with Craig and Appia, and coming down through the German theatres, and now reflected in America in the work of such artists as Robert Edmond Jones, Raymond Johnson and Sam Hume, was against both the artificiality of the older theatre and the naturalism of the Belasco group. The aim of the newly conceived stagecraft was to bring the setting into definite spiritual harmony with the play. Suggestion was substituted for imitation, creation of atmosphere was considered more important than indication of a definite locality, and the appeal of the setting was subordinated to the synthetic appeal of the production as a whole, by simplification and conventionalization. Where visual beauty was the aim of the dramatist and artist-director, the setting became a thing of beauty predicated upon the mood of the play; and its decorative quality grew out of skilful composition of line and mass, subtle use of colour, and a system of lighting that tended more to artistic expressiveness than to mere naturalness.

II

In order to differentiate art-theatre methods of stage setting from other phases of stage design, which are not less new but still inapplicable to the special problem presented by synthetic production, it is necessary to outline three tendencies of modern stagecraft: the improved pictorial, the plastic and the decorative.

I wish to write of the pictorial phase first because it can quickly be dismissed when one is concerned only with forces that will count in the art theatre. Certain Russian designers have developed a wonderfully brilliant technique in painting scenery. They accept the old theatre convention which said that an exterior setting must be done in painted perspective on canvas. In other words, they still consider the stage scene a glorified easel picture. Some of their settings are among the richest and most interesting of the creations masquerading under the name of the new stagecraft. But they really have nothing to do with the most typical phases of the new movement. They mark merely the perfection of a process that will never give absolute satisfaction in the theatre. They are infinitely better than the settings in the same method which used to fill all our theatres, because they are painted by art-

ists instead of sign painters. But two points are to be noted about them: First, they employ painted perspective in the backgrounds, and this will never prove entirely satisfying on the stage; for no matter how cunningly the artist may work to hide all traces of the incongruity, there will always be a disillusioning difference between the real perspective of the foreground and the painted perspective at the back—and audiences will be less and less tolerant of this absurdity as they become trained in appreciation of the plastic, perspective-less method. And second, these artists are employing a purely *representative* method: instead of placing backgrounds and objects on the stage, or suggesting these things by concrete means, they attempt to represent them by the illustrator's method, which properly has no place in the theatre. One might quite as rationally paint objects into the background of a statue or sculptured frieze. The painter, indeed, has proven himself inadequate to the tasks of the theatre; and the designer for the stage of the future will need the training of architect, sculptor and interior decorator rather than that of the present-day painter—training in arrangement of line and mass, modelling of form, and harmony of flat colour-tones.

For my part, I believe that within not so very

many years the painted-perspective background will be as clearly ridiculous and out-of-date in a stage production as the soliloquy and aside are in modern playwriting. I know that ninety-nine out of every hundred of the so-called artists on Broadway would call me crazy if I repeated that statement to them. But I do not base the contention on mere theorizing—although I was convinced of the soundness of the theory of plastic setting several years ago. I have seen both sorts in large and small, and the plastic is so far superior by every measurement that its time is sure to come. In at least two of the most progressive theatres in this country, the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit and the Los Angeles Little Theatre, not a single painted-perspective scene was used during the season of 1916-17; and I doubt whether a painted drop has been shown in the Chicago Little Theatre in all the years of its existence. And these are only signs of a widespread development. Practically every member of the small group of deeply-thinking, far-seeing artist-workmen on the American stage has repudiated the painted-perspective theory and method. Certainly Raymond Johnson, Sam Hume, Norman-Bel Geddes and Robert Edmond Jones have—and that represents some of the soundest opinion on this side of the Atlantic. I



THE WONDER HAT

think that Joseph Urban alone among the important stage decorators in America occasionally reverts to the easel-painter's system.

III

The plastic method of setting, which has so largely replaced the pictorial method in the progressive theatres of both Europe and America, implies primarily that the artist shall work with things in the round instead of painting their semblances on a flat canvas. Such objects and backgrounds as he can bring to the stage in characteristic form, without suggesting a display of virtuosity, are brought there; such others as cannot be shown in plastic form are suggested by concrete means, and not by pictorial representation. If a church scene is needed, the artist does not paint a picture of a church for a background, but sets up a single pillar or archway, which in its architecture and its arrangement of aspiring lines suggests the calm dignity and heavy solemnity of a church. If a forest scene is called for, the artist no longer paints a canvas with a multitude of trees, each branch and leaf accurately drawn; he is more likely to arrange a series of cloth strips in place of tree trunks, and then light the stage so subtly that the mystery and depth of a forest are atmospherically suggested. If he has a mod-

ern room to show, he discards all painted relief, such as mouldings, doorframes, mantels, etc., and simplifies lines, masses and furnishings—conventionalizes the room by reducing it to the simplest form in which it will evoke the proper atmosphere. The new stage artist seldom gets away from the use of canvas flats; they are still the lightest and most easily manipulated material for stage building. But he paints no objects on the canvas—he paints it instead in flat colour. His canvas flat thus appears on the stage as one side of a solid, and not as a picture representing two or more sides in perspective.

The reader who still finds the distinction between the plastic and pictorial methods puzzling will do well to compare the illustrations appearing in this book with those to be found in the usual dramatic magazine or book. Not only are all the scenes shown herewith free from painted perspective, but in most, no paint was used except in flat mass as one would paint a house-wall. Of the two noticeable exceptions, the settings for "The Constant Lover" and "The Lost Silk Hat," where a conventionalized tree and vines have been painted, I shall have more to say in a moment.

IV

When the reformers got rid of the artificialities of the pictorial stage setting, they at first accepted a plastic stage barren of any sort of decorative intent. The action is what counts, they said; and they proceeded to strip the stage of everything that might prove an interruption to interest in the action. Some advocated a return to the Elizabethan stage, others adopted curtain backgrounds; but all came sooner or later to the realization that a merely neutral background only does half its duty to the production. It is infinitely better than the old setting that interfered with the action by distracting the spectator's attention to foreign matters; but it adds nothing to the total appeal.

In the plays produced with the new ideal in mind the setting has a definite decorative function. The point to be remembered is that the decorative quality must take its rise in the *milieu* of the play. It must say to the eye what the poetry of the play says to the ear. The decorative note must be there, whether it be in the atmospheric lighting effects of Appia, or in the mysterious masses of light and shade created by Craig's manipulation of screens, or in the gorgeous halls and palaces of Urban.

This decorative tendency is what is implied in the word stylization as applied to stage setting. But when one speaks of stylization it is immediately necessary to defend one's position against two sorts of misconception: first that stylization is typified by Reinhardt's ruthless method of transforming a Greek play into a Reinhardtian circus performance; and second, that it provides a method of overwhelming a good play, or redeeming a poor one, by sets that are a show in themselves. This danger of overdoing the setting will always be inherent in the decorative method to a certain extent; and for this reason a number of managers and critics who examined the case hastily and insisted upon judging by extreme examples, have started a definite re-action against the whole new movement. What they failed to see is that this new phase of art, like many another, is valid only when practised by artists of the deeper vision—in this case, when practised under the control of artist-directors who have the impression of the ensemble of play, acting and staging at heart.

Stylization of setting, according to my ideal, is merely a method of bringing the scene into harmony with the essential spirit of the play, a means of beautifying the background to harmonize with the beauty of the poetry and the action. By his

own particular style of working, by his individual manner of using line, mass, colour, light and shade, the designer may stamp the setting with his own creative genius; but it is not the best sort of stylization unless it tends to reinforce the mood of the play as a whole. In other words, the decorative quality of the setting must be founded on dramatic fitness.

The stage setting for art theatre production, then, will be designed by artists who gain decorative effect through plastic mediums. But I wish to add that I believe there is a certain type of play in which more latitude may be allowed in the designing—where a certain artificiality and exuberance of fancy may be carried into the decorative work. In most plays for children, in pure fantasy, in artificial comedy, in any production in which story value, dramatic tension, and tense mood are less important than imaginative turns of thought, surprise and fanciful suggestion, there is possibility of adding to the play's appeal by a compelling symbolism in the settings. A classic example is the Moscow Art Theatre's mounting of Maeterlinck's "The Blue Bird," a play which is at least episodic if not definitely undramatic, and so not in danger of having its continuity of meaning obscured by dynamically interesting settings. The Moscow artists tried to visualize

the symbolism of the various scenes in their backgrounds, with the result that the action progressed through a series of fairyland pictures of a beautifully imaginative sort. Perhaps the reader will better understand if I say that the settings had the unreality, the fancy and the decorative quality of Kay Nielsen's illustrations.

The settings for such productions may legitimately be painted, for here a certain noticeable artificiality is not out of place. But perspective work and purely representative painting are not in keeping with either the general requirements of the stage or the spirit of conventional drama. The only excuse for painted scenery is a rigid conventionalization. So long as it has any realistic intent it is out of key with the other elements. If we must still have painters in the theatre, they should be not of the old realistic sort, but of the imaginative-decorative type. It is in the spirit of such conventionalization that two of the settings in this book were conceived. The painted vines and the fanciful tree in the sets for "The Lost Silk Hat" and "The Constant Lover" are in perfect keeping with the spirit of these extremely artificial farce-comedies.[1] It seems to me that much is yet

[1] These two settings were designed and painted by Katherine McEwen, who worked with Sam Hume in the scene department throughout the season.

to be done in this direction of fanciful staging—when we have a Kay Nielsen of the theatre.

V

It is hardly necessary to treat lighting as a separate topic. I have suggested several times the larger place it assumes in the new stagecraft. It is employed not only as a binding force—as one more means of reinforcing the spiritual mood of the play—but also as a definite means of developing the emotional rhythm. In certain European theatres lighting has all but taken the place of the setting; and in this country Urban and Hume especially have been pointed out as artists who "paint in lights."

Just as changes of feeling, thought and emotion can be reflected in the lighting of a production, so can they be suggested in the colour arrangement. We are happily rid of the muddy colours of other days, on the stage as in the picture gallery, and a whole new scale of beautiful and expressive shades and tones has been placed at the artist's disposal. While the equipment of the progressive theatres in this country has not been such as to facilitate experiment, the more important designers are thoroughly alive to the potentiality of colour. I have seen several series of sketches by Norman-Bel Geddes in which the pro-

gression of colour impression was definitely designed to evoke the changing moods necessary to the drama. And Claude Bragdon is promising a more revolutionary use of imaginative colouring in productions specially designed to affect the emotions through colour-sensibility.

VI

In the search for new methods which will aid in bringing unity to the production, many devices of value to the art theatre have been invented. Certain ones are purely mechanical—the revolving stage and wagon stage are examples—and these for the most part are designed to cut down the waits while settings are being changed, thus tending to eliminate from the course of action breaks long enough to have a disillusioning effect. The idea of suggesting an underlying unity of story by letting certain elements of the setting appear in each succeeding scene, has been worked out by diverse methods. Joseph Urban used what he called a permanent skeleton set through all the acts of "The Love of the Three Kings" at the Boston Opera House, and he has staged several other productions with stationary inner prosceniums and portals, achieving all changes in scene by new elements introduced at the back of the stage. Raymond Johnson has used a similar

arrangement of permanent fore-structure and changing inner scene for some of the productions at the Chicago Little Theatre; and Norman-Bel Geddes has used a single set of screens in varying combination for a play in seven scenes, at the Los Angeles Little Theatre. All these experiments have been valuable, showing that simplified and standardized settings can be used not only with a saving of time and expense, but with increased unity of feeling. But none are quite so suggestive, or quite so valuable to the American art theatre in its formative years, as two recent inventions which can be used not alone for the several scenes of a single play, but for practically every scene of every play worth producing. One is the screen setting, "the thousand scenes in one scene," invented by Gordon Craig; the other is the permanent adaptable setting designed and built by Sam Hume, who adopted Craig's basic theories and then worked out an independent solution of the interchangeable setting problem with different materials. These two systems of building stage scenes are of such practical value to the would-be art theatre that both demand extended description.

VII

Gordon Craig, arguing from the fact that hundreds of thousands of dollars are wasted annually for scenery that loses all its value when the play's run is over—and this for a type of scenery that is utterly devoid of atmosphere, and usually lacking in artistic value of any sort,—set out to discover a sort of stage scene that would be adaptable for any poetic production. The system of portable folding screens which resulted from his years of experiment solved the problem beautifully, providing atmospheric backgrounds for a surprisingly wide range of play, at exceedingly small cost. But here is a point to be noted: the system is so simple, so devoid of trickery and pretentiousness and extraneous ornament, that only men of deep artistic perception and delicate vision, only imaginative artists and true poets, can obtain the best results from its use. For this reason the invention has not made its way into the commercial theatre, and probably never will, despite the immense saving its use would entail. In the Moscow Art Theatre's famous production of "Hamlet" all the many and varied changes of a setting were merely re-arrangements of a set of Craig's screens. And at the Abbey Theatre of the Irish

Players the screens were used for poetic plays, with results which mark them as particularly fitted to bring out the spiritual mood and synthetic impression which are the implied goal of art theatre production.

The invention is described in *The Mask,* in an unsigned article but presumably by Gordon Craig, as follows:—

"The scene is made up usually of four, six, eight, ten or twelve screens, and, although sometimes of more than twelve, seldom less than four. Each part or leaf of a screen is alike in every particular except breadth, and these parts together form a screen, composed of two, four, six, eight or ten leaves. These leaves fold either way and are monochrome in tint. The height of all these screens is alike.

"These screens are self-supporting and are made either of a wooden frame covered with canvas, or of solid wood.

"With screens of narrow dimensions curved forms are produced, for large rectangular spaces broader leaved screens are used, and for varied and broken forms all sizes are employed. . . .

"Sometimes certain additions may be made to this scene, such as a flight of steps, a window, a bridge, a balcony, and of course the necessary

furniture, though great care and reserve must be exercised in making these additions so as to avoid the ridiculous.

"This scene is a living thing. In the hands of an artist it is capable of all varieties of expression, even as a living voice and a living face are capable of every expression. The scene remains always the same, while incessantly changing. . . .

"Through its use we obtain a sense of harmony and a sense of variety at the same time. We may be said to have recovered one of the unities of the Greek drama without losing any of the variety of the Shakespearean drama.

"We pass from one scene to another without a break of any kind, and when the change has come we are not conscious of any disharmony between it and that which has passed."

William Butler Yeats, who had to do with the screens at the Abbey Theatre, is quoted in the same issue of *The Mask* as follows:

"The scenery differs entirely from the old style of scenery, and consists chiefly of portable screens, by means of which beautiful decorative effects can be obtained, the working of the screens being based on certain mathematical proportions by which the stage manager can make walls, pillars, etc. . . . a palace almost in a moment, a palace



THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

of great cyclopean proportions, and which can be changed again almost in a moment into a room with long corridors, and be changed again into a third and very different scene just as quickly.

"The primary value of Mr. Craig's invention is that it enables one to use light in a more natural and more beautiful way than ever before. We get rid of all the top hamper of the stage—all the hanging ropes and scenes which prevent the free play of light. It is now possible to substitute in the shading of one scene real light and shadow for painted light and shadow. Continually, in the contemporary theatre, the painted shadow is out of relation to the direction of the light, and, what is more to the point, one loses the extraordinary beauty of delicate light and shade. This means, however, an abolition of realism, for it makes scene-painting, which is, of course, a matter of painted light and shade, impossible. One enters into a world of decorative effects which give the actor a renewed importance. There is less to compete against him, for there is less detail, though there is more beauty."

After the production of "Hamlet" at Moscow the correspondent of the London *Times* wrote of the screens as follows:

"Mr. Craig has the singular power of carrying the spiritual significance of words and drama-

tic situations beyond the actor to the scene in which he moves. By the simplest means he is able, in some mysterious way, to evoke almost any sensation of time or space, the scenes even in themselves suggesting variations of human emotions.

"Take, for example, the Queen's chamber in the Castle of Elsinore. Like all the other scenes, it is simply an arrangement of the screens already mentioned. There is nothing which definitely represents a castle, still less the locality or period; and yet no one would hesitate as to its significance—and why? Because it is the spiritual symbol of such a room. A symbol, moreover, whose form is wholly dependent upon the action which it surrounds; every line, every space of light and shadow going directly to heighten and amplify the significance of that action, and becoming thereby something more than its mere setting—a vital and component part no longer separable from the whole."

The last lines are eloquent testimony to the value of this type of setting as an integral part of the production, as a part which, instead of disturbing the action as the usual setting does, contributes to the mood. In other words, it is an ideal means to art-theatre ends, so far as they concern the background of the play.

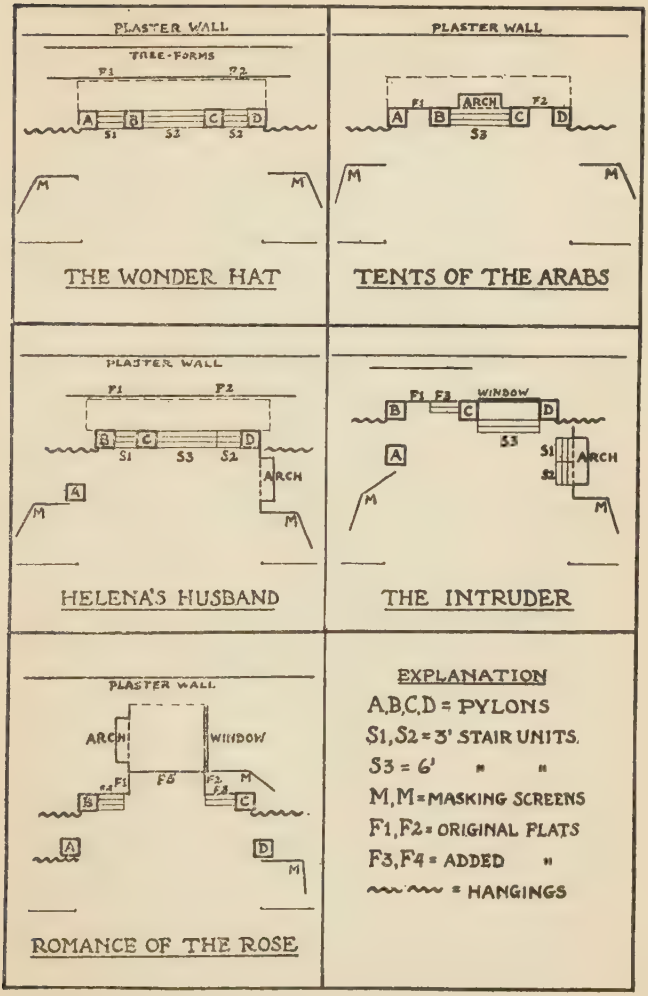
Gordon Craig's screens have never been adequately tested in this country. But some of the little theatres surely will make adaptations of the system, if, indeed, they do not arrange with Craig (who holds patents) for complete sets according to the original designs. This is the more likely to happen now that Sam Hume has made such a success with his adaptable setting at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. He gained inspiration from Craig, and he adopted Craig's principle of an interchangeable scene—and he is always careful to acknowledge this indebtedness. But his success in working out an independent system suggests that other artist-workers in the American theatre may start with the same principle and arrive at somewhat different but equally satisfactory results.

VIII

Before describing Hume's setting in detail, I wish to express my belief that no other of the progressive theatres in America has shown a series of scenes so impressive and so well harmonizing with the respective plays, as the eleven variations of the permanent set at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. Putting aside consideration of realistic backgrounds at the Detroit playhouse, and remembering that several of the permanent setting

arrangements fell considerably short of the ideal, it is still clear that this was the finest group of stage backgrounds yet devised for a series of plays in an American theatre. It is possible to point to single productions of Urban or Jones or others as equalling or surpassing the average attained by Hume at Detroit; but no consecutive series of plays has been so well mounted. I know from direct comparison that the Arts and Crafts group was far superior to the series of settings for poetic plays of the Washington Square Players and the Portmanteau Players. The point to be remembered, if one is interested in little theatre and art theatre economics, is this: while gaining superior results artistically, Hume spent for eleven settings not more than the cost of two average settings in these other theatres. It is well to remember, too, that the range covered by the eleven scenes included such widely differing requirements as the interior of a mediaeval château for "The Intruder," the Gates of Thalanna for "The Tents of the Arabs," the wall of Heaven for "The Glittering Gate," and a Spartan palace for "Helena's Husband."

The permanent setting includes the following units: four pylons, constructed of canvas on wooden frames, each of the three covered faces measuring two and one-half by eighteen feet; two



Five arrangements of the permanent setting at the Arts and Crafts Theatre.

canvas flats, each three by eighteen feet; two sections of stairs three feet long, and one section eight feet long, of uniform eighteen-inch height; three platforms of the same height, respectively six, eight, and twelve feet long; dark green hangings as long as the pylons; two folding screens for masking, covered with the same cloth as that used in the hangings, and as high as the pylons; and two irregular tree-forms in silhouette.

The pylons, flats, and stairs, and such added pieces as the arch and window, were painted in broken colour, after the system introduced by Joseph Urban, so that the surfaces would take on any desired colour under the proper lighting.

The setting was seen in its simplest form in "The Wonder Hat" on the opening bill. The arrangement is indicated in the first diagram. The four pylons were set in pairs with the stairs between, with the curtains and screens used only to frame the picture at the sides. The two flats were laid on their sides to form the balustrade back of the platforms.

For "The Tents of the Arabs" the first important addition was made to the setting in the form of an arch. The pylons, central stairs, platforms, hangings, screens and tree-forms were set exactly as in "The Wonder Hat." The only changes were the addition of the arch at the cen-

tre, and the closing of the outer openings between the pylons by means of the flats that had previously formed a balustrade. While the physical changes were few, the atmosphere of this setting was so entirely different that probably not a half dozen people in the audience realized that any of the same elements appeared in the two scenes. Incidentally it was one of the simplest and most satisfying backgrounds shown during the season.

As seen on the stage, in colour and under Hume's subtle lighting, the setting for "Helena's Husband" was the most beautiful of the series. Aside from the properties, there was nothing on the stage that had not already appeared in the scenes of "The Wonder Hat" and "The Tents of the Arabs" except two decorated curtains. Two pylons, two sections of stairs, the platforms and the balustrade appeared exactly as in "The Wonder Hat." Only one pylon was used on the left side, thus leaving a wider opening for the balcony. The fourth pylon was brought downstage right to suggest a corridor entrance. The arch and curtains formed a similar wall and entrance at the left.

With the addition, then, of two decorative curtains and the two necessary properties, this remarkable atmospheric scene was evolved, merely by re-arranging elements already on hand—and

elements, incidentally, which had long before paid their cost.

For the production of "Abraham and Isaac" the second important addition to the original setting was made, when a large Gothic window-piece was provided as an altar backing. The rest of the background was made up of the green curtains, and two pylons with decorations suggesting stained glass windows.

For Maeterlinck's "The Intruder," which demanded a room in an old château, one important addition was made, a flat with a door. At the left was the arch, then a pylon and curtain, and then the Gothic window, with practicable casements added. The rest of the back wall was made up of the new door-piece flanked by curtains, while the third wall consisted of two pylons and curtains. Stairs and platforms were utilized before the window and under the arch. A small two-stair unit was added, leading to the new door. This arrangement afforded exactly that suggestion of spaciousness and mystery for which the play calls. When the picture of this setting is placed beside that of any other in the whole series, it is difficult to see any duplication of elements —yet practically every piece used in the earlier plays is there.

In the setting for "The Romance of the Rose,"

a balcony on a street, a still more puzzling difference is to be noted. Here there are two new pieces, a flat forming the front of the balcony, and a long flat with a niche for the Madonna figure. Temporary platforms also had to be constructed for the balcony floor. The pylons and hangings were used down-stage, to create the shadows of the dark street on either side. The two original flats and the arch and window, hardly seen by the audience, formed the walls at the sides of the balcony. On account of the cost of constructing the two new flats and the platforms this was one of the most expensive of the eleven variations of the permanent setting; but even here the entire outlay was less than twenty-five dollars.

Of the other plays "The Glittering Gate" was the only one demanding important changes. The four pylons were utilized for the wall of Heaven, and immense gates were swung between the central pair. The two acts of Molière's "A Doctor in Spite of Himself" were played before arrangements of the hangings, in the most daring of all Hume's experiments in simplification—and experiments that were not wholly satisfying.

After the remarkable beauty and appropriateness of the series of settings, the most notable thing about them is their cheapness. Although the original equipment, as seen in "The Wonder

Hat," cost more, perhaps, than the average little theatre setting, it was far less expensive than the usual commercially designed set. And the particular point to be noted is that, once installed, changes and additions at very slight cost served to create effects which would have called for an outlay of several hundred dollars for each scene under the usual system. In the ten variations arranged after "The Wonder Hat" the total cost of added pieces averaged less than fifteen dollars for each scene. To the notoriously poor—though often notoriously extravagant—little theatres, such a solution of the scenic problem should be a godsend.

The success of the system as worked out by Sam Hume is dependent upon several factors. First, of course, there is the physical requirement of a stage with a sky-dome or plaster background (a plain cyclorama drop is a passable substitute), and a flexible lighting equipment. In the second place there must be rigid standardization of the original elements and of each added unit. And most important, there must be a director who combines inventive ability with artistic taste.

The permanent setting at Detroit was used for poetic plays, for those productions which demanded atmospheric background rather than



HELENA'S HUSBAND (*Compare lighting here with that shown in frontispiece plate*)

definite locality, and occasionally for such a modern interior as that of "Suppressed Desires." But no attempt was made to extend its function to the mounting of realistic plays; special sets were built for such plays as "Trifles," "The Last Man In," and "Lonesomelike." It happens that the settings for these plays represented one of the weakest spots, artistically, of the whole achievement at the Arts and Crafts Theatre; and of course each of these poorer settings cost more than any of the variations of the permanent set. This suggests the possibility of standardizing a modern interior which could be used in variation for practically any modern realistic play. It seems to me certain that some one of the little theatres will perfect a setting of this sort. Then it would be possible, with a permanent setting based on Craig's plan or Hume's, and an adaptable realistic set, to stage any play of either the poetic or realistic sort.

No one can say how serviceable the adaptable setting idea will prove when our art theatres mature. It may be that when they grow up and have money to spend freely, they will retain only the plastic and atmospheric theory of Craig, and prefer to build each setting anew in pursuit of that theory. My own judgment, however, is that, aside from the artistic principles involved,

the basic economic idea of the system is such that it will be retained even by the most advanced and wealthy art theatres. They will more freely add new units and odd pieces, but they will rely on a permanent setting for the core of most of their backgrounds. This, however, is only speculation. What I very strongly feel to be true now is this: At the present stage of the art theatre game in this country, no organization can afford to overlook the invention; for it offers to the real artists in the theatre a simple solution of one phase of synthetic production, at a price within their means. It means more art in the playhouse, and fewer financial failures.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUESTION OF AUDIENCES AND THE COMMUNITY

I

IT would be useless to set down a matured art theatre, playing the best drama continuously, in the average American city. It would find no audiences ready to accept its offerings, and it would have no relation to the art life and civic life of its community. It would die for not having its roots in native soil.

Somewhat paradoxically, it is useless to organize audiences and community theatre associations before there are companies aiming to supply the demand for better dramatic fare. Drama League Centres and drama circles of women's clubs have made this mistake. The organizers recognized the deplorable condition of the American stage, and they stirred up people to form audiences and demand better drama; and then, having nothing but an outside knowledge of the theatre, they asked the tradition-bound and unenlightened commercial manager to step in and

supply some art—as one might ask the prostitute to turn virgin again, and radiate sweet innocence ever afterward.

The result is that the country now has an immense audience for written drama, which is a mighty good thing in its way; and this audience is demanding the best in produced drama, but has had absolutely no training in recognition and appreciation of what that best will be.

The Drama League Centres, with a few notable exceptions, have been notoriously neglectful of creative dramatic enterprises in their own districts. Little theatre groups in all parts of the country have complained that they could obtain neither co-operation nor encouragement from the one organization founded ostensibly to aid progress toward better theatre art. The Drama League is organized as a league of community art theatres should be, with local self-governing centres loosely joined in a national body. But until it sees the wisdom of locking forces with the creative groups, it will tend to remain primarily a sort of Chautauqua reading circle, and its boasted aid towards a new theatre will remain merely a boast.

The first normal step toward a community theatre is likely to be in some such obscure venture as a little theatre working on an experimental

basis, amateurishly at first, but with intelligent growth toward an ideal. Such practical beginnings, nearly always initiated by a group of enlightened artist-workers, should early receive the support of the enlightened theorists of the community, as represented by such organizations as the Drama League. The two should then develop together. The producing group must be professionalized, probably by calling in an experienced art director, but must retain its native character. The audience group must be willing to overlook certain inevitable failures of the producing company at first, not looking for artistic perfection in the beginning. On such foundations will a group of sound community theatres appear in this country. And that will be our national theatre.

II

"Community theatre" is at best only a relative term. As most of us use the phrase it has nothing to do with the "civic theatre" of Percy MacKaye, in which community participation on the stage is the test. His civic theatre associations would have nothing to do with the purveying of art for the people, but would only use the art form as a convenient medium for developing a wholesome civic consciousness, through bringing many people shoulder to shoulder in play—which, like

an Iowa picnic, is an excellent thing in its way, but has little to do with the higher phases of art. "Community theatre," moreover, does not necessarily mean a theatre which is designed to serve a majority of the people of its city, or even any considerable percentage of the population. If the owning and producing groups have grown up out of native experiment and interest, if the productions reflect the *best* demands of the community in a form acceptable to enough members to keep the institution thoroughly alive, if the price of admission is low enough so that no wide section of the public is debarred through inability to pay for admission, then it is a community theatre in a very practical sense.

III

It is natural that audiences for an "advanced" art of the theatre should not exist in the average American city at present. Because the playhouse became commercialized and its productions stereotyped, theatregoers have been trained in appreciation of the obvious and the sensational, with seldom a chance to form a taste for the phases of dramatic art that are most worth while.

But *potential* audiences for the best drama do exist in the average American city. They are unorganized and badly scattered, but can be built

up as an art theatre grows. I base my opinion here on the experience of such organizations as the Arts and Crafts Theatre and the Washington Square Players. Few cities could look more unpromising for art theatre activity than the Detroit of a few years ago. It is a city of material interests, with an immense proportion of foreign and uncultured elements in the population. Its art life is far more sluggish than that of many a smaller city of the Middle and Far West, and it is a poor theatre town even for commercial companies. But when the most active native art group, after scattered experiments without professional direction, built its theatre and called in one of the foremost artist-directors in the country, the audience was found. When the Washington Square Players started production in New York they were marked for failure by those "on the inside." No audience, was the verdict. But the organization not only stayed, but moved to one of the large downtown theatres, and continued to strike an art average far above that of the surrounding business theatres.

I think that there is not a city of one hundred thousand people in this country where a beginning organization aiming toward an ultimate art theatre could not find a supporting audience, granted that the appeal was not too narrow at

first, that an expert artist-director was in charge, and that the project was managed in a business-like way. And this audience would grow with the organization, so that the mature art theatre would have its proper community support.

IV

Most American little theatres lean for their chief support upon a subscription audience. Because they are not endowed, nor capitalized, as is the business theatre, they find the security enjoyed under this system necessary to any sort of permanency. But the subscription system has more advantages than the securing of a certain income each season. A subscribing audience always feels a proprietary interest in the theatre. It is the link between the producing group and the community. This is a matter of such importance that I think that even an endowed art theatre, with its implied economic independence, would be very unwise to abandon the subscription basis. From humble beginnings to maturity it should have its "members."

In Berlin there is a theatre with 50,000 subscribers. It happens in this case that the subscription audience also owns the theatre. But the point is that through such organization the

producers provide plays better chosen, better acted and better staged than the commercial average, for a charge of twenty-five cents per member. The saving that makes this revolutionary result possible may be summed up in this way:

No one makes a speculative profit from the theatre; there are no failures, and the spectator is not charged, as in the American system, for the play he sees and for two others on which the producer lost money; the actors are employed by the year, and do not have to charge an inflated price for their services, as our American actors do when employed, to make up for long intervals of unemployment; the rental charge is low because the theatre does not need to be in the high-rent district, and because it is always in use (American theatres charge against the short season lessee enough to cover the loss accruing during the considerable number of weeks when the building is dark); and there are no traveling expenses, advertising costs are radically reduced, and sundry savings are effected through standardized methods in the producing and business departments.

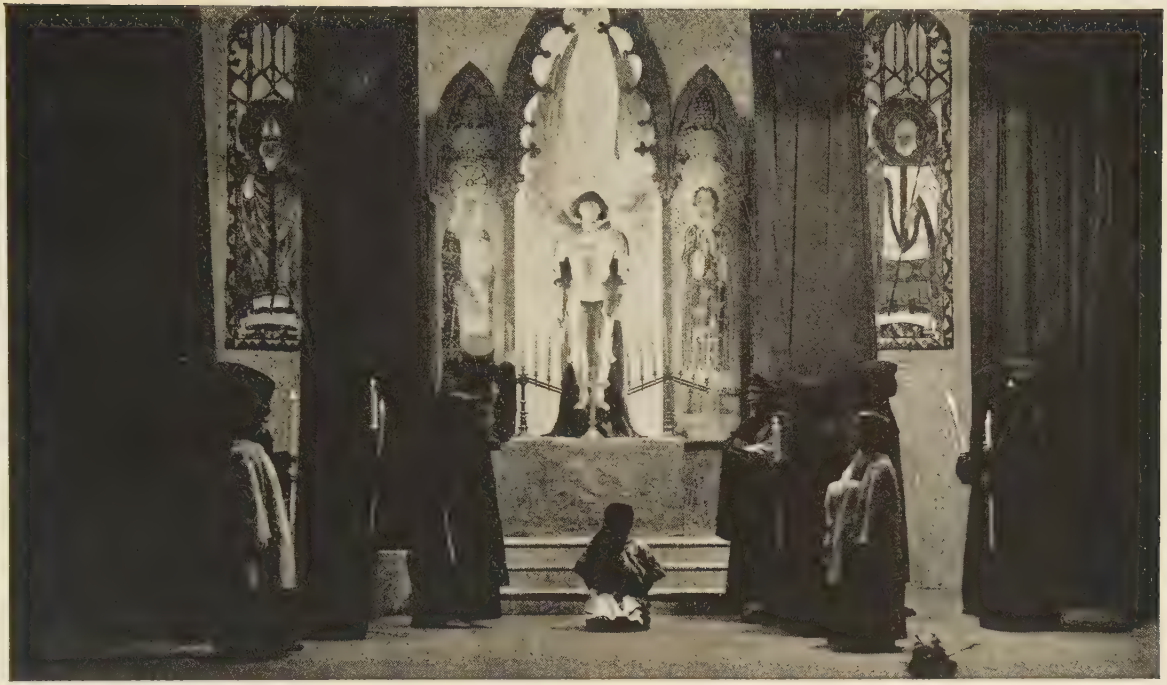
The subscription system thus not only binds the community to the theatre, but when properly managed may prevent so much waste that the productions can be bettered even while the prices

are being cut to a fraction of those charged by commercial theatres.

V

The relation of the theatre and the community should not be merely that of artist and patron; it should involve a wide influence in shaping the social and recreational life of the city. For the present, because we are in such a dramatic waste, it is most important that the little theatres and art theatres do educational work in their communities in an effort to create some sort of public standards of amusement. As the need is so elementary, it is probable that this work can be begun best through the schools.

At Detroit, Sam Hume counted among his duties as director of the Arts and Crafts Theatre the organization and instruction of a class of teachers. These people, he argued, are directing and will continue to direct student productions at the schools, and if they have no other model they will make their staging a poor copy of that seen in the commercial theatre. So he set about to teach them the underlying principles of theatre production, with special reference to a simplified but genuine stagecraft. During the second year the class, largely experimental so far, will take its definite place in the organization of the Arts



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

and Crafts Theatre. In order further to connect the theatre's work with the schools a special form of membership was arranged for teachers, and at the later productions the dress rehearsals were opened to invited audiences of students and teachers. Both these features will be continued during the second season.

Sam Hume carried the work of the theatre out into the community by lecturing extensively before women's clubs and other organizations; and a wider audience was brought to the theatre by lectures delivered there by authorities of national and international reputation. Several schools called Mr. Hume into consultation while planning stages for their auditoriums, and this work he regarded as part of his service to the community as director of the theatre. But the most novel feature of his extension work will be added during the next season, when he plans to build a portable stage, somewhat like that of the Portmanteau Players, on which he will be able to produce in school auditoriums and social halls the best of the plays arranged for the Arts and Crafts Theatre. This not only will help to overcome the limitations of small audiences and high prices now obtaining at the theatre, but will carry the offerings into every section of the city, with consequent wide influence on public taste.

There is no reason why the art theatre should not be a part or even the nucleus of such social centres as many cities are now trying to provide for their people. The settlement theatres, such as that at Hull House, are embodiments of the idea, but they are a little too closely linked up with the redemption of slums to maintain a high artistic standard. We want art theatres in which the best life of the city, and particularly the art life, revolves around the dramatic centre.

This idea is more applicable to smaller cities than to such a metropolis as New York or Chicago. In many small towns seeds for such institutions have already been sown. In some the theatre will never climb beyond an amateurish plane; but it will be a vital element in the community life nevertheless. I have in mind at the moment a little theatre at Ypsilanti, Michigan. When the first suggestion of such an institution was made, there was little response. But now the Ypsilanti Players have a tiny playhouse of their own, offering productions at regular intervals, and the organization is perhaps the livest social element in the town. It has provided a bond of interest that unites factions and overrides narrow social distinctions. When the organization moves from its present cramped quarters, moreover, it plans to make its new building more

than a theatre in the ordinary sense. It will be in effect a social centre, designed to afford wholesome amusement of various sorts, with the dramatic activities as a central attraction and binding force.

How far a theatre alone can weave its place into the deeper life of a community has been proved at the Prairie Playhouse at Galesburg, Illinois, where a bar-room was remodeled to serve as a playhouse. Here one of the few enlightened centres of the Drama League joined hands with the amateur producing group, and the theatre became a definite force in the recreational life of the community, a notable social asset, and an institution for the citizens to be proud of.

Such playhouses are not likely to approach closely the art-theatre ideal of production. At both Galesburg and Ypsilanti the architectural and mechanical limitations are such that even an inspired artist-director could not hope to reach the finished standard implied in the term "art theatre." While the producers often make a virtue of their necessity, and occasionally secure effects with a fresh loveliness unknown in the commercial theatre, they are distinctly limited in achievement of beauty in staging. But even under such limitation there is in their activities a real service to the art of the theatre. In the

list of Galesburg plays one finds the names of new and unknown authors sandwiched between those of Charles Rann Kennedy, Anton Tchekoff and William Vaughan Moody; and at Ypsilanti the range has been equally wide. In other words, even though the staging may have been merely passable, if not crude, the communities in which such playhouses exist have had tastes of the best in drama; both players and audiences have been influenced toward the best in dramatic literature. When these people visit New York, moreover, they will go to see first, not "The Century Girl," or the Winter Garden Show or "Little Lady in Blue," but the Washington Square Players, or such unusual offerings as "The Yellow Jacket" and "Pierrot the Prodigal." In other words, each progressive centre, no matter how small or how amateurish, reflects its good work on the activities of all the others.

Following the thought as it applies to a large city, one remembers that the Neighborhood Playhouse has had a definite influence on the theatrical situation in New York. Commercial managers are not insensible to the fact that last year's compilers of "all-American" lists of plays ranked two Neighborhood productions in the first ten; that another Broadway critic described one of the Playhouse's amateur players as giving perhaps

the finest individual performance of the season; and that the Neighborhood group, in conjunction with amateur and semi-professional companies elsewhere, introduced a dramatist who became more of a sensation with the great American public than any playwright discovered on Broadway in the last ten years. Managers hear of striking incidents like these; and while they cannot capture the qualities that make the Neighborhood Playhouse productions most worth while, they will modify their offerings a little to meet the competition; and there will be thus a slight advantage to the whole New York community.

In this way the new spirit, finding expression in any narrow section of a community, reaches out until it affects the whole. Audiences everywhere benefit by its achievement of a new standard of excellence in production—and one more step is taken toward creating a nation-wide audience for the coming art theatre.

CHAPTER IX

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

HENRY IRVING was fond of saying that "the theatre must succeed as a business if it is to succeed as an art." The statement carries a false implication as well as a sound core of truth. It is not true that the theatre must pay dividends on the excessive capitalization forced upon it under our abnormal competitive commercial system. It is not even true that a theatre must be entirely self-supporting—for we know that art usually flourishes more readily under endowment. But whether a theatre is economically dependent upon chance audiences or endowed to a greater or less extent, it must be intelligently organized and cleanly administered, or it cannot serve art wholesomely or permanently. The endowed theatre must be self-supporting within the terms of its endowment, and every playhouse must adopt common-sense business principles in management, if it is to succeed in creating and perpetuating a worthy art.

Organization and Management

Too many little theatres have discounted the value of business efficiency, and there have been innumerable failures on that account. For this reason I wish to emphasize the need for sound management. No little theatre, or other organization looking toward art theatre production, should initiate activities without a definite placing of control and a predetermined system of administration.

I

The plan of organization which has proved most successful is one under which responsibility is three-fold. First, there is a holding group, owning the theatre or representing the owners, which determines the policy and is a court of last appeal for all questions arising in the two administrative departments; second, there is an artist-director who is responsible for every activity behind the curtain, and has complete power in everything pertaining to production; and third, there is a business manager who is responsible for front-of-the-house administration, and who has charge of seat sales, rentals, bookkeeping, etc.

The controlling group, which must be organized as a self-perpetuating body, necessarily determines the general policy of the theatre. If it has not full ownership, it represents the true

owners before the world, whether they are merely a larger or smaller group of individuals, or an organized audience, or a municipality. As representative of the community, this holding committee is a go-between responsible to the membership or audience on one side, and holding reins leading to the artist-director and business manager on the other. It must be ready to meet suggestions, demands, and complaints from these three directions. It holds the only check on the director, and it must decide all questions arising between that often-temperamental official and the hard-headed business manager. It must determine such matters as the number of performances to be given, basing its decision on the estimates of producing and business departments; and it must adopt a policy which will satisfy the audience to a reasonable extent. Needless to say, perhaps, this committee should be composed of forward-looking artists and art lovers, with a safe portion of business sense thrown in by way of balance.

The ownership of American art theatres, the question whether they will be in the hands of individuals, or of societies more or less responsible to the community, like Art Associations, or of municipalities, is purely a matter of speculation. But it is probably true that private ownership

is the method offering fewest advantages, and municipal ownership a goal to which we should work definitely but very cautiously.

Private individual ownership is usually destructive of art ideals because the single owner seldom feels any responsibility to the community, and he is interested more in profits than in giving the best drama. If a single owner were inspired by the highest ideals, and through wide experience and breadth of taste could take the place of the controlling group, administering his theatre directly through his artist-director and business manager, he might develop a model art theatre. But the same limitations pertain here as in the matter of autocratic government. A just and enlightened autocracy is perhaps the best type of government that ever existed; but the benevolent despot is so rare that all the world is driven to seek democracy instead.

Group ownership, ownership vested in a small body of artists, workers and others deeply interested in the theatre, has proved successful at the Moscow Art Theatre and other institutions in Europe; and it is not an uncommon basis of organization among American little theatres—although most of them do not own buildings, but only the settings, good will and similar assets. Under this system the owners naturally act as

the controlling body, as a board of administration acting through the artist-director and business manager. There is nothing in this small-group ownership to prevent the theatre becoming a subscription house, with a definite community relationship, if the owners are sincere in their desire to serve art and their audiences rather than to make speculative profits.

Ownership vested in such a group as trustees for an organized audience, or for the municipality, is an ultimate goal in this country, and a system which has proved phenomenally successful in certain German cities. But it is doubtful whether the ground has already been prepared for the establishment of a municipal art theatre in America. It seems that the cry for community playhouses has been a bit ill-timed. The natural order is to progress from experimental art theatre to municipal theatre. I have more faith in development of the movement through playhouses owned for the present by groups of artist-workers or by art societies.

I have very little faith in the development of significant theatres where ownership remains with a group of amateur actors alone. A clear distinction should be made between the old-time dramatic-social clubs and the theatres developed by organizations interested primarily in the art



A DOCTOR IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

of the theatre. Doubtless there are amateur players' clubs in Chicago; but none of them has had anything to do with the two important experimental theatres in that city, the Chicago Little Theatre and the Players' Workshop. In Detroit there are two very active amateur actors' associations; but even though they use the Arts and Crafts Playhouse and have gained artistically through seeing the work of Sam Hume's company at that theatre, they remain in the unimportant list: they still are more interested in the theatre production as a social function and as a means of amusing themselves than in the betterment of dramatic art. The Arts and Crafts Theatre had separate origin in a group of artists.

A case of mixed origin, with ownership still vested in a body of amateur actors, is to be seen in the San Francisco Little Theatre. Here the amateur Players' Club, accepting the impulse of the progressive movement, built its Little Theatre. But while the institution is one of the most active in the country today, it has failed to approach art-theatre standards. There has been a certain accretion of progressive artists, with a consequent raising of ideals, and a desire to do the best thing; but the organization has been so handicapped by the ideas clinging from its older social-dramatic club days that it is in no way to be classed with

such institutions as the Chicago Little Theatre and the Arts and Crafts Theatre. It has proved valuable as a trying-out ground for local playwrights; but if it be granted that the first object of such theatres should be rounded-out production, the San Francisco group has so far failed. Perhaps this type of organization would rise to art-theatre standards if put in charge of an artist-director. But the artist-director would here be responsible to the actor-owners, an arrangement that would be satisfactory just so long as he chose actors in accordance with that group's personal wishes, and intolerable as soon as he struck out independently and cast the plays to the best advantage artistically. The actor-owner is subject to many of the same objections as the actor-manager of the commercial theatre. The system presents so many dangers that it would be wise for any amateur dramatic club desiring to rise to the little theatre or art theatre level to appoint a controlling board including a majority of non-actors, and then submit entirely to the decisions of that board.

One other sort of association ownership merits attention. When two long-established art associations opened new buildings in the autumn of 1916, each containing a complete theatre equipped according to progressive standards, a new and

significant phase of theatre progress in this country was recorded. An outcast among the arts was restored to a dignified place beside painting and sculpture, and the idealists and recognized artists of two communities came into direct touch with theatre production. The Artists' Guild of St. Louis, to be sure, after one production of its own, leased its theatre to an outside organization that was ill-managed and brought no fame to the playhouse. But hereafter the art society will have direct control over the policy to be followed throughout the season, having employed an artist-director to organize the existing dramatic resources and supervise all matters pertaining to staging. The Arts and Crafts Society of Detroit at the beginning adopted the wiser method of keeping control of its theatre's policy in its own hands; it called in the most experienced artist-director available, and left to him the formation of a company in the Society's name. The Society exerts control through its Theatre Committee, a group of artists and men of affairs who have shown particular interest in dramatic art. The success of the first season speaks for the wisdom of adopting such a system.

Personally I believe that there is an immense benefit to be gained by the progressive theatres through close co-operation with the well-estab-

lished art societies; and it is not at all unlikely that many an American art theatre of the future will be founded and developed through the activities of such organizations. They offer those advantages of a definite foothold in the community, permanency of organization, and partial endowment (since they usually own their buildings), which are so important in the formative period of a theatre's career. I may add incidentally that, if the experience at Detroit is a fair example, the dramatic activity will in turn bring certain benefits to the art society—the new vitality which comes with awakened interest in a new art, and wider community interest through the bringing of a new audience to the society's building.

II

Of the second of the departments existing under the three-unit system of organization, the producing department, much has been written in earlier chapters. Of the duties and powers of the responsible head, the artist-director, I have already said enough. But I wish to emphasize one point: the artist-director must have complete charge of every activity connected with staging. To him, and to him alone, the electrician, the scene designer and builder, the costumer and the

actor must look for their orders. His one limitation must be that of the size of his budget. Beyond that he should be free from interference by the business manager or by the controlling group above. That group may remove him if a production has in their estimation failed. But while the production is in preparation they must maintain a "hands-off" policy.

It was because of the failure to observe this clear division of power, this even balance of authority and responsibility, that the 1916–17 season at the Los Angeles Little Theatre failed to take rank among the lastingly important art theatre experiments in this country. The Players Producing Company under the leadership of Aline Barnsdall leased a theatre and inaugurated a season which should have been brilliant. No less than three experienced directors were secured, Richard Ordynski, Irving Pichel, and Herbert Heron. The broth was endangered right then and there. But to make matters impossible, not only was no one of these directors given full charge, but the three together were subject to interference from above. The supervising brain was not that which attended to the details of staging. The result was confusion among the stage forces, delayed openings, and dissatisfaction in various quarters. The theatre brought together

a remarkable array of talent, and was not handicapped financially. But, despite its achievement in certain directions—particularly in the stage settings of Norman-Bel Geddes, and in the value of individual plays—the season as a whole was a disappointment. Failure to establish a definite line between the controlling group and the producing group, and failure to give the artist-producer a free rein, all but wrecked the enterprise.

The placing of complete control of the stage in an artist-director's hands does not mean that co-operation of artists in staging is impossible. On the contrary, there will usually be the fullest co-operation of the director with the members of the controlling committee and other artists directly interested in the work. The point is that the director should be left free to take the first step toward such co-operation; it should not be forced upon him. At Detroit, Sam Hume took full advantage of the unusual talent placed at his disposal through connection with the Costume Department of the Society of Arts and Crafts;[1] and a member of the Society, Katherine McEwen, collaborated with him in designing and making

[1] The three artists of the Costume Department, Helen Plumb, Alexandrine McEwen and Katherine McEwen, formed practically an advisory board, and Mr. Hume turned to them for expert aid in many departments of the work.

the settings; but he was put under no obligation to work with this or any other group.

It is noticeable that the two most important little theatres in the country are those in which the directors have had broadest powers and greatest freedom from interference—at Chicago and Detroit.

III

The business manager is a rarity in the American little theatre. Whereas the artist was entirely displaced by the business man in the commercial theatre, the business man has been almost entirely lost in the visionary artist in the insurgent theatre. It was natural that the revolt should be carried to extremes, and that institutions without centralized responsibility and with volunteer administration should neglect, if not scorn, business efficiency. People usually join such organizations because they are interested in art, and they avoid the thankless tasks of selling tickets, keeping books, and house management. But little theatres have made their most serious mistake in this direction. They would gain if they would realize that "non-commercial" does not necessarily mean—indeed, must not mean—unbusinesslike. If they cannot find a volunteer worker to carry on the hard work of the business depart-

ment, they will save in the end by employing a manager. Indeed, to initiate little theatre or art theatre work without a capable man in charge of the business department is to court failure.

In a sense the business manager is just as important as the artist-director. At any rate a failure in his department is quite as certain to wreck the whole enterprise. He should be as deeply interested in the theatre, and he should be ready to make the same sacrifices of time and effort for it. He must have as complete charge before the curtain as the artist-director has behind. His relation to the holding group is that of the supervising manager of a business corporation to his board of directors. His relation to the artist-director is limited to a determination of the amount to be expended by the producing department. Having determined the probable income for the season, he is able to say to the artist-director (through the controlling board): "You may spend so much on the entire series of plays, which means approximately such-and-such an amount for each production." As to the relative expenditure on different items, for costuming, for instance, or lighting, or settings, he properly has no authority, so long as the director keeps within the gross amount of his appropriation. As to possible friction between the business manager and art

director, there is always a way of settlement through the board to which both are responsible. And let me add that it is better to have such friction if the questions involved will not otherwise be brought up. Dodging the issue of control over expenditures has wrecked more than one little theatre. The recently organized Pittsburgh Theatre Association inadvertently spent two thousand dollars on its first production, and right then and there nearly killed the whole project —because no business manager held a check on what was being paid out by the producing department.

The duties of the business manager fall naturally into four divisions: ticket sales, including subscriptions and box office sales; house management; advertising; and the duties of a treasurer, book-keeping, paying out moneys, and budget-making. Of the first two of these divisions little need be said. The types of subscription, whether or not there shall be a subscription committee for a personal canvass of the community, and arrangements for ticket sales to the public, are matters that have to be determined by special conditions. Under house management are grouped such duties as organizing a force of ushers, attending to lights, ticket-taking, janitor service, and, if the organization owns its theatre, rentals.

These are matters which will be taken care of by common sense—if the manager is definitely charged with them in the first place.

IV

The work of the business manager in his capacity as treasurer of the theatre should be as thoroughly systematized as that of any corporation. Not only to safeguard against conscious or unconscious dishonesty, but also in order to make possible accurate estimating of the theatre's current status and future possibilities, it is necessary to keep strict account of every penny paid in or disbursed. No materials should be bought, or bills paid, without receipts being obtained. Only thus can the bookkeeper be assured of absolute accuracy. This lesson was learned by experience at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. At the first production of the series, purchases of stage accessories and incidentals were made at random. When accounts were made up not only was there a question of exactly what the total cost had been, but it was impossible to make out an itemized list of expenditures, thus preventing accurate budget-making for the future. It was necessary to make a general expense charge which prevented exact apportionment of charges against the various departments

at the end of the year. This lesson once learned, a system was adopted which made necessary a written record of every expenditure. When an expert accountant reported his examination of the books to the subscribers at the end of the season, he pointed out that this theatre, in contrast to nine out of ten in the non-commercial class, not only finished the season with a surplus, but knew exactly where every cent of its five thousand and odd dollars had gone, with the exception of the general expense item from the first play. This sort of common-sense administration means increased confidence among the theatre's supporters, firm foundations for every new project, and peace of mind for director, manager, and owners.

The bookkeeping system adopted at the Arts and Crafts Theatre was of the ordinary double-entry sort. By taking a trial balance at any time it was possible to know not only the standing of the theatre as a whole, but whether the production in hand was keeping within estimates. A balance was taken after every production, and it was then possible to readjust apportionments for the remainder of the season.

One cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of planning ahead and seeing the necessary money in sight before launching a series of productions. Budget-making is, indeed, the first

important step after preliminary organization has been effected. Usually the director and controlling board make a rough estimate of the probable cost for the season. Then the manager and subscription committee start their campaign. After the field for subscriptions has been canvassed so that a fairly accurate estimate of the income can be made, the director will probably have to make revised cost estimates. But the final budget (because the only one based on the amount of money actually available) will be that made at the time actual work on the first production is begun.

I wish to emphasize also the wisdom of economizing on the first production of a season. The tendency to "splurge" at the beginning is likely to bring results similar to those recently experienced at Pittsburgh. More than one little theatre worker has told me that a safe system is to deduct ten per cent of the subscription money for overhead expense and permanent equipment, and then divide the balance by the number of productions, in order to find the amount to be spent on the first production. In other words, do not count at all on box office sales, but make your beginning performance on the basis of subscription returns only. Doubtless there will be some sales to the general public, but at the start

no one ever knows just how small they may be. Usually they turn out to be about one-third of the most conservative estimates. After the first production is over, it is possible to revise estimates to include money taken in at the box office, and to plan more expensive productions on that safe basis.

If the theatre does not own its home, the rent charge must be added to the ten per cent allowed for overhead expense and permanent investment; and at the beginning of a theatre's career there will be extra expense for initial equipment. Other items will also have to be accounted for in apportioning the income under special conditions. But the point to be remembered is that the business manager must always be in a position to say to the board, "Your next production cannot safely cost more than such-and-such an amount." And the artist-director must trim his budget to come within that amount. If he complains that he is hampered by the low expenditure allowed, the controlling group can point out only two ways to meet the situation: choose plays less expensive to produce, or cut down the number of productions. For the first law of little theatre economics is that the cost of production must be kept within the means available.

V

In setting down here lists of the expenditures and receipts of a typical American little theatre, I do not mean to suggest that these can be made the basis of a budget for a mature art theatre scheme. Beyond pointing out that sound business management is necessary to the ideal institution, as it is to its forerunner, the little theatre, one can say little definitely about the administration of a true repertory art theatre. There is no experience on which to base estimates. It is necessary to learn by establishing such theatres and applying common sense during the first year—or by working forward phase by phase from the present amateur basis to the professionalized-amateur ideal.

But this record should prove valuable to beginning groups, and suggestive to other theatre workers in the amateur field. The Arts and Crafts Theatre represents a typical phase through which the *pre*-art theatre must pass. Certainly most communities must have such a theatre before they attain the ideal sketched in this book.

In studying these figures one must take into consideration certain variable quantities and make allowance for items which differ as one moves from city to city. First it is to be remembered that the Society of Arts and Crafts owns

its building, and therefore the item of rent does not appear. The settings were for the most part constructed in the theatre, and so cost considerably less than those bought from so-called scenic studios; and there is also a large saving here through the frequent use of variations of the permanent setting, and through volunteer labour in painting other settings. With those reservations the figures are typical.

EXPENDITURES FOR SEASON OF FIVE PRODUCTIONS

First production	$ 990.35
Second production	954.24
Third production	925.90
Fourth production	866.99
Fifth production	1,099.13
Overhead expense (organization, box office, etc.)[1]	519.24
Permanent properties	50.82
Total	$5,406.67

APPORTIONMENT OF EXPENDITURES

Royalties			$ 315.00
Properties			143.75
Costumes			519.91
Settings:	Lumber	$142.65	
	Dry goods	61.24	
	Paints	56.23	
	Hardware	130.98	
	Labour	126.00	517.10

[1] This overhead charge does not, of course, include the director's

Electrical supplies and electrician	$ 100.49
Extra labour (carpenter and electrician)	102.75
Stage-hands	95.25
Wigs and make-up	83.00
Music	39.00
Printing	273.85
Typing parts	15.95
Cartage	35.09
Director's salary (five months) [1]	2,500.00
General expense [2]	665.53
Total	$5,406.67

RECEIPTS

Subscriptions	$4,412.50
Box office sales	1,083.75
Total	$5,496.25

salary. One month's salary is charged against each of the five productions.

[1] At the end of the year the question came up whether this item was not excessively large in proportion to the whole cost of the season. It must be remembered that in this particular case the Director's salary covered also that of a business manager, since Mrs. Hume did practically all the work with which that officer would be charged. But the argument which brought about Mr. Hume's re-appointment was this: it is better to employ at a high cost the best artist-director available, and end the season with a record of both artistic and financial success, than to employ a cheaper director and have poorer productions with a probable deficit at the end of the year.

[2] This item includes box office expense, advertising, fees to lecturers, and the unapportioned item mentioned on page 202, as well as the usual incidentals.

The box office sales were as follows: 1st production, $214.75; 2nd production, $130.00; 3rd production, $215.50; 4th production, $238.50; 5th production, $285.00. There was thus a steady gain in sales from the second play to the last.

VI

Advertising is a matter of puzzlement to the average little theatre group. The mature art theatre, playing continuously, will have to announce its offerings through newspaper columns; but even it will save all that the commercial manager now spends for display space in the papers and on billboards. And for the average little theatre it is a question whether any sort of bought advertising pays. Those of us who have had to do with the project at Detroit, at any rate, have become convinced that publicity for such a theatre depends on pleasing the audiences so that they talk about the productions and encourage other people to come. The only productions advertised in the newspapers were the second and third in the series; the box office returns on the second were the lowest during the season, and the gain shown on the third was not such as would indicate that the advertising had any effect on attendance. The money paid to the newspapers seems to have been dead waste.

The publicity gained through newspaper criticisms likewise seemed to have little effect on the growth of the theatre. At first an effort was made to interest the dramatic critics. The leading morning paper boasts that its dramatic department is directed by the dean of American critics. It is a commentary on the state of American criticism that this writer not only refused to cover the first production at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, but did not once set foot in the house during the season. He wrote amiably enough of musical comedies and other importations from Broadway, but he let it be known that it would be beneath his dignity to attend the productions of unpaid actors. The critics of the evening papers proved to be less case-hardened, and even though the assignment was given as often as not to a sporting writer or a cub reporter, the reviews toward the end of the season showed many gleams of intelligent appreciation and criticism. But the average was such that during the coming season, if the director has his way, the theatre will issue no press passes. If the papers consider the productions of sufficient news value to warrant paying the usual admittance fee, they can send their reviewers. Their attitude in the past has not made it worth while for the promoters to meet them halfway.

Detroit, unfortunately, is not an exceptional city in the matter of dramatic criticism. Enlightened and unprejudiced reviews are universally rare. It was part of the theatrical trust's work to stifle honest criticism, and to gain control of all channels of publicity. American newspaper owners, be it said to their dishonour, bowed to the system as a rule. That was nearly twenty years ago; but even today the relation between the average paper's advertising department and its dramatic reviews is such as to make newspaper honesty a matter for national shame.

The venal press, to my mind, has had much to do with the degradation of the theatre in this country, and particularly with the apathy with which the public has come to view the playhouse. At first the papers destroyed all dramatic standards by printing what they were paid to print, regardless of the value of the play in question. But the public was not long fooled. Intelligent people merely realized that they could not believe what they read in the papers, and stopped going to the theatres unless they read in some reliable magazine review that a certain play was worth while. It is this attitude which now makes the way of the progressive theatre difficult, and which largely nullifies the great aid the newspapers might otherwise extend to the little theatres. We

need a new standard of criticism as well as a new theatre.

VII

Endowment is probably necessary to the development of the best type of art theatre. In insisting upon good business management I have tried to make clear the reservation that this does not necessarily mean complete self-support. Business efficiency means merely elimination of waste, and when one has it, one may still need to lean upon a subsidy. It is certain that a theatre searching for the highest ideal must have aid in the beginning; and even in its maturity an endowment is likely to make it a real art institution instead of a compromise.

In Europe the best theatres are seldom expected to succeed as speculative business ventures. The most important theatres in France and Germany, with a few exceptions, are to be found in the list of those receiving state, municipal, or private subsidies. When one thinks of the playhouses in which greatest progress has been made toward the new synthetic ideal of production, one remembers that the Moscow Art Theatre, now a profitable affair, was able to get through its early years only by the generosity of a wealthy amateur; and the Irish Players survived their early struggles by



A DOCTOR IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

grace of Miss Horniman's subsidy. In this country the Arts and Crafts Theatre is endowed to the extent of being freed from the rent burden, and the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York operates under the same advantage. The Chicago Little Theatre, on the other hand, staggered for years under the rent charge. But it recently created for itself a sort of endowment after-the-fact by going through bankruptcy proceedings. But America has yet to see a properly subsidized playhouse.

When a writer or artist says that he wants endowed theatres, people begin to talk about the New Theatre, or others made in its image. I have already pointed out that that institution was not really endowed; and even if it had been, it would have had to go through many radical changes to become a true art theatre. We do not want institutions of that sort, and we especially do not want theatres similarly unrelated to their communities. What I wish to see is wise subsidizing of the really progressive little theatres that have their roots in native soil, with a growing endowment as they progress toward art theatre stature.

No sort of endowment is worth while if it gives an unenlightened rich man control over productions. The stage must be left to the artists, with-

out interference from those who have made their activity possible. It is unwise, moreover, to give patrons a reward in the shape of an option on the best seats in the house. Endowment should be absolute, leaving the theatre free economically and artistically. It should provide for administration through a controlling board, which should be representative of the community and which should have artistic insight enough to employ the right artists. Beyond that provision the rich man should make no restrictions on his gift.

It seems to be the rule in Anglo-Saxon countries that art must thrive on starvation or die. Our commercial organization makes no provision for adequate return to the artist for his product. The better the quality of the art, the less is offered in exchange for it. Those who have the means to encourage the creative artist usually lack the taste and discernment necessary to recognize the worthy, and the passion for art which would make their giving seem necessary. Achievement of the ideal art theatre, nevertheless, largely depends upon opportunity created by moneyed people. It all comes back to the question, "How are we to persuade the unseeing millionaire?"

I trust that the few millionaires with whom I have talked about these things will realize that I speak of their kind in the abstract—for I know

that there are fine exceptions to the rule of art-blindness. But I confess that I have wondered, as I sat with some of them, that they so failed to see the true and ultimate value of things—that they so entirely overlooked the chance to do a *lasting* service (and incidentally achieve a lasting fame) in the building of civilization. For I believe passionately in art as a force for salvation—that the things art brings, beauty and spiritual growth, are the most important things in human life. And so when the mood is on me, even my friends' millions are not safe from my envy, nor do I keep myself from ruminating on what an art institution the spending of those millions would yield.

I see him (in the composite) before me now, sitting there talking of his practical problems, while I wonder at all the possibilities for good or evil—or worse still, just for common uselessness —that are shut up in his checkbook. I am impatient at times when I think of his imitation Italian sunken garden, on which he has squandered the price of an ideal art theatre building; and I sometimes see a suggestion of injustice in his second automobile, that would secure a struggling artist five years of study and creative effort. As often as not I end by thinking that after all we might just as well give up the effort for a sub-

sidized art—that after all we are Anglo-Saxons, and may as well resign ourselves to the traditional Anglo-Saxon way.

But at other times, I think that I see a way to bring art and those millions together. After we artists, and dreamers, and radicals, and planners, have passed through a few years of struggle (he knows that struggle is good for our souls—but sometimes he forgets that the soul dries up after too many years of it) we shall emerge with ideas too clearly right, and too well-ordered, for him to stand out against them. Then if we show him that we have declared for *sound business management,* as well as for art, he will be won over, checkbook and all. And then we shall have a chain of wisely endowed efficient art theatres from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific.

CHAPTER X

BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT

WHEN artists of the theatre set out to capture that illusive thing called mood, they proceed by bringing harmony into every related part of the production. In voice, in movement, in lighting, in scene, they attempt to create an atmosphere which will be all-pervasive, and which will project itself as a spiritual spell over the spectators in the auditorium. But they are handicapped at the start if the building in which the play is presented does not serve to foster that mood, if it tends to destroy rather than reinforce the spiritual *milieu* of the production. The synthetic ideal has a very definite connotation in relation to theatre architecture; the connection is such, indeed, that one cannot insist too strongly upon the necessity of housing an art theatre in a noble building.

I

American theatre architecture as a rule is pretentious, ornate, and thoroughly vulgar. When

architects approached the problem of building a playhouse they accepted a totally false conception of their duty. They saw the theatre as a place of amusement designed to attract the money-spending public, and so they reflected its commercial character in glitter, gaudiness and red-plush pretentiousness. They accepted the business man's estimate of the theatre as the home of "the show business." And so their buildings range from a type neighbouring on the sensational five-cent moving-picture house to a type conceived as a sort of Coney Island for intellectuals. They found what they considered authoritative precedent for "heaping it on" in that culmination of the French-Italian social-dramatic ideal, the ornate Paris Opera House.

And so today the average American theatre is entirely out of key with everything that the new art of the theatre stands for. It is not dignified, or simple, or beautiful; it not only fails to reinforce actively the mood evoked by the play, but it is not even neutral and reposeful enough to leave the spectator's mind free to enjoy that mood. A vast majority of the existing playhouses in America must be abandoned by the insurgents to the commercial theatre, together with most of the people and plays in them.

II

A few theatres have been built recently which approach the new ideal. While we Americans have not made one-tenth the progress of the Germans, for instance, and while we have not an architect who can be named in the same breath with Max Littmann, we can look with real satisfaction on Winthrop Ames' Little Theatre; and we can find encouragement in certain features of the Arts and Crafts Theatre, the Chicago Little Theatre, the Artists' Guild Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, and two or three others of the newer buildings.

These playhouses tend to reflect in their design and decoration the underlying principles of the art of the theatre. In their best aspects they are marked by those things which distinguish the new movement from the old tendencies. They are characterized by a noble simplicity of design, sincerity, reticence and reposefulness. They are pleasing in an unobtrusive way, and not in the boastful manner of the Paris Opera. They are planned to harmonize with the *best* phases of dramatic art, and not with its surface glitter.

I once tried to sketch my architectural ideal of a playhouse, and I wish to quote this earlier description as suggesting what I believe the Ameri-

can art theatre should be in design and decoration. "In the first place it is clear that the building will not attract the eye by gorgeousness and intricacy, but rather will satisfy it simply, with a sense of beauty and repose. The façade will be distinguished by sobriety and simplicity. There will be in it the dignity that breeds solemnity—that dignity which heretofore has been reserved almost exclusively for the church. . . . The theatre architect, when once he has recognized the qualities that the façade should reflect, will realize that the perfect accomplishment is less a matter of decorating—what crimes have been committed in the name of decoration!—than the perfect balancing of simple lines and well-ordered masses. Avoiding on the one hand the fussy and the gaudy, and on the other the classically cold, he will evolve from the infinite possibilities that combination of restful lines and perfect spacing which most exactly solves the problem at hand, and most perfectly reflects the inner spirit of drama.

"Within the theatre there will be quite as rigid exclusion of distracting detail and unmeaning ornament. In the interior even more than in the exterior it is desirable that everything shall be designed to induce concentration rather than to scatter the attention. A chaste simplicity in

decorative forms, and a beautiful and subtle harmony in colouring, are far more conducive to a sense of calm contemplation than a riot of unmeaning ornament and brilliant colour.[1] A certain richness in decoration is not out of place within the theatre, but it should be less the richness of profusion than that which comes from simple forms combined with just the right decorative touch by a master artist."

Is it necessary to add that the art theatre will be democratic? That it will offer a complete and satisfying view of the stage from every seat? That the old horse-shoe style of auditorium will give way to the simpler form adopted by Littmann and others of the leading progressives? That the chairs will not be deeply cushioned in one portion of the house, decently covered in another, and merely bare wooden benches in another? And of course I cast my vote against having any boxes in a sensible theatre. They are relics of a barbaric era, when the display of wealth was

[1] Just such chaste simplicity and delicacy of colouring made Helen Freeman's Nine O'Clock Theatre in New York a joy to the beholder. The theatre was closed almost before its work had started, so that its dramatic achievement was slight; but every theatre designer should have been forced to visit it as an object lesson. In no other auditorium have I experienced the same feeling of restfulness, and the same sense of freedom from jarring notes.

a primary aim, and when the social occasion was more important than the dramatic.

III

The architect who plans an art theatre must be trained in more than the aesthetic requirements of synthetic production; he must have wide knowledge of the technical demands as well. He must be a very close student of modern stagecraft, or his building may prove to be out-of-date and impossible for the new artist of the theatre when the first production goes on. He must know that a plaster dome (or provision for the best sort of cyclorama) is an absolute necessity. If the owners are ready to pay for all that the artist asks, the architect must be informed about revolving stages and sliding stages. He must know also what the artist means by "fixed portals" and "inner proscenium," and he should know what has been done toward the invention of a satisfactory adjustable proscenium. He must know why Fortuny set out to revolutionize stage lighting, what he accomplished, and what modifications later artists have made by way of improving his system. In this matter of lighting equipment particularly the architect must have the most comprehensive knowledge, if he would do justice to the producers who will use his theatre. For it

is no longer possible to let out to an electrical firm a blanket contract for "a lighting system."

As a matter of fact there is not an architect in the country today who combines the necessary knowledge of his own art with the necessary experience on a stage. It is a sweeping statement; but a moment's reflection should resolve all doubts. For the reform in stagecraft has been developing so rapidly that only those working continually in the progressive theatres know absolutely which of the new inventions are practical and which are more dangerous than useful. The really important architect cannot take time to experiment day in and day out with the latest innovations; and as yet there are no books that tell one-tenth the story.

For a group planning to build a little theatre or a big theatre—indeed, any building at all approaching art theatre standards—I should advise just one solution of the stage equipment problem: call in one of the really progressive artist-directors, and let him and the architect fight it out, with the provision that the artist-director's word shall be final in all questions of equipment behind the curtain.

Do not let the architect do it alone—we have more than enough monuments to his ignorance—and do not let him work it out with the sort of

professional advice he is likely to call to his aid from the business theatre. Call in, rather, an experienced artist of the type of Sam Hume or Maurice Browne; or if it be a monumental theatre, Joseph Urban. These people know the stage and stage equipment in the light of the new ideals. Their advice is likely to save the theatre from the necessity of making expensive alterations later—and it will save a deal of cussing and disappointment on the part of the artists.

IV

The size of an ideal art theatre is a matter for speculation rather than for estimate on the basis of experience. The very large theatre is doubtless passing. The house seating two thousand or more people is going out of fashion because its dimensions are such that the intimacy demanded by the new ideal is impossible there. On the other hand, there is a tendency on the part of the insurgents to make their auditoriums too small, even where space and expense do not dictate a limit. Littleness is made a fetich, and many a group will waken later to the fact that the size of its auditorium is limiting its artistic development.

My own ideal theatre would provide a seating capacity of seven or eight hundred. It is by no



SUPPRESSED DESIRES

means certain that a repertory playhouse of that size could be made a financial success in an average American city without a substantial subsidy. But it seems to me that such a theatre would come nearest to combining economic independence with a satisfying intimacy of atmosphere. It might be possible to bring the number of seats up to approximately one thousand and still avoid the barn-like atmosphere of most of our existing theatres.

In other words, a theatre seating fewer than seven hundred people is likely to demand, for continuous art theatre production by a paid company, a larger subsidy than any we can now reasonably expect; and a smaller theatre, moreover, will not be able to serve its city as a community playhouse in any wide sense. On the other hand, a theatre seating more than a thousand is likely to be too vast in proportions to foster the sense of intimacy and to keep the attention of all the spectators concentrated on the stage. The ideal art theatre figure seems to lie between these limits.

V

I have said nothing about planning dressing-rooms. I take it for granted that the architect will consider that the art theatre is to be used by

ladies and gentlemen, and that their dressing-rooms are to be quite different from the pens provided in the usual commercial theatre. He will remember, too, that the green room disappeared from the American playhouse only when business-men got the upper hand, and he will restore it in his design. And if he can make space available by any sort of manipulation, he should add a rehearsal hall.

But now that I am writing about what he *might* do, instead of what he *must* do, let me add that the theatre I dream of—the building I shall have when I am considerably older and immeasurably wealthier than now—will be a double theatre. It will have a large auditorium and a small—one for the usual types of drama, and the other for very intimate plays and for experiments. And both these auditoriums will be beautiful according to the principles I have tried to suggest at the beginning of this chapter. Both stages will be equipped under the supervision of the most enlightened artist-director in the country. And there will be a library for study as well as a rehearsal hall. And if I am very wealthy indeed, there will be an open-air theatre by way of annex.

Yes, it is only a dream. But only when a number of us dream such things shall we be able to

jolt the architect out of his preoccupation with theatre ideals and theatre forms of an age that is as dead as Bulwer-Lytton and Boucicault. Only as we dream of the ideal shall we have something as finely satisfying as the half-dozen existing exceptions to the popular rule—the rule of making the playhouse a gilded barn of commerce.

CHAPTER XI

UNREALIZED IDEALS

THIS book has been largely about unrealized ideals, and the title of this epilogue might stand over more than half the chapters. The artists in the theatre stand only on the threshold of achievement, and the art theatre of the future looms up as an unformed half-imagined thing. But I wish here at the end of my book to stand facing forward at that threshold, to gather together the several threads that have brought the artists there, and to gaze with them (half-dumb, I am afraid) at the wondrous thing that still awaits accomplishment.

I

I think I see spread before me a new dramatic map of America. It is not like the old one—which appeared so strangely like an octopus, with its bulk over New York and its arms stretching out to Canada and Texas and the West coast. Instead there are many independent centres.

Each represents, I am told, a native playhouse which is concerned with the art of the theatre, just as in these same cities there are galleries concerned with painting and sculpture, and libraries concerned with serious literature. The buildings are individually beautiful, and one recognizes instinctively that they are *theatres*—that is, not amusement halls, but places for seeing beautiful things on a stage. Some of these buildings are owned by small groups of artists and workers, others by larger groups of art-lovers, still others by organized audiences, and finally, a few by municipalities. They all are administered, however, through enlightened groups of artists, and each has its artist-director who is in full charge of staging. Each has a reasonable appropriation each year, sometimes coming entirely from admission fees, and sometimes partly from endowments; but always the funds are handled in a businesslike way through a business manager (for these playhouses have outgrown little theatre methods). And finally, the native playwright gets his chance along with Shakespeare and Synge and Maeterlinck—and, be it noted, he is writing plays not unworthy of the honour.

If you ask the artists in one of these playhouses, they will tell you that it grew on foundations laid years ago by a group of visionaries who founded

an amateurish little theatre; they were laughed at by the know-it-alls of the business theatre, secure in the knowledge of traditional ways of doing things; but they learned gradually to discard the weaknesses of the amateur while retaining his love of the work, and they chose certain good things and a few good people out of the commercial theatre without taking over any of the tricks and vulgarities of the commercial institution. And finally they became professionals of a finer sort than any employed by the businessmen, and their playhouse became recognized as something as necessary to the community as the art gallery or the library or the schools.

That is the ideal in general; and that will be the method of its coming.

If you ask me why I am confident that it will come, when we have not now a single example of an art theatre housed in a perfect home, with a reasonable appropriation and ideally organized, I can only point to the Arts and Crafts Theatre and the Chicago Little Theatre and the Washington Square Players, and say that here are tangible evidences that many artists and some men of money have seen the new ideal. Indeed, that threshold is becoming a bit crowded. And just a few are crossing it, with timid feet, perhaps, and they are peering down one corridor after another.

After a while, as more artists and more millionaires become interested, and when experience lightens the dark places a bit, they will step in boldly and become masters of the house.

A DISCURSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

A BIBLIOGRAPHY should be a guide from which the student can learn quickly where to turn for authoritative information about a given phase of a subject. But I have learned from experience that it usually is a list of titles of all books even remotely connected with that subject—a list that requires study in itself and leads into many false trails. The brief bibliography that follows makes no pretence to completeness. But I hope that it may serve, better than any hitherto published, to lead the reader to the best printed material (in English) about the progressive movement in the theatre.

The pioneer among general works on the newer tendencies of theatre art (as distinguished from mere drama) is Huntly Carter's "The New Spirit in Drama and Art" (New York: Kennerley, 1912). This contains first-hand accounts of theatres and methods of production in the principal European cities. While the material is occasionally coloured by Carter's individualistic theories, and is not closely co-ordinated, the chap-

ters are invariably entertaining and remarkably suggestive. The volume should be studied and re-studied by every one interested in the new theatre. A more practical handbook of information about the progressive theatre in its technical, artistic and literary aspects is Hiram Kelly Moderwell's "The Theatre of Today" (New York: Lane, 1914). This contains an immense amount of detailed material about modern plays, methods of staging, organization, etc., and is absolutely indispensable to students of and workers in the art theatre. The only other book attempting to sum up modern tendencies of the theatre as well as drama is my work "The New Movement in the Theatre" (New York: Kennerley, 1914). I attempted therein to summarize the movement as it affected not only types of play, but stagecraft, theatre architecture, etc.

Of books of theory, by far the most important is Gordon Craig's "On the Art of the Theatre" (Chicago: Browne's Bookstore, 1911). The reader will find this remarkable volume pregnant with new ideas, and stimulating in its urge to get away from tradition and to do creative work in the theatre. It is the most important source book of the new movement. "Towards a New Theatre" (New York: Dutton, 1913) contains forty of Craig's designs, and its text is worth

reading and then re-reading. There is no English translation of Adolphe Appia's important work "Die Musik und die Inscenierung," nor is there even a fair transcription of his theories into English. A summary may be found in French in Jacques Rouché's "L'Art Théâtral Moderne," which, by the way, is the most valuable French work on progressive theatre methods. Of the theories and achievements of Max Reinhardt there is an excellent analytical account in Huntly Carter's "The Theatre of Max Reinhardt" (New York: Kennerley, 1914). This treats incidentally of most of the theories and sources of the art theatre movement, and is a book of prime importance.

Of special phases of modern theatre development, the literary revival has received most attention from writers. Of interpretative accounts by far the best is Ludwig Lewisohn's "The Modern Drama" (New York: Huebsch, 1915), although one must make allowance for the author's bias toward Hauptmann and for an over-valuation of the realistic movement. A more extensive, but undigested and diffuse account is to be found in Frank Wadleigh Chandler's "Aspects of Modern Drama" (New York: Macmillan, 1914). A more scholarly and philosophical work, and one dealing extensively with the social implications

of the new drama, is Archibald Henderson's "The Changing Drama" (New York: Holt, 1914). It is, however, not a good book for the beginning student. More in the nature of textbooks, with study-lists and questions, are the volumes of Barrett H. Clark: "British and American Drama of Today" and "Continental Drama of Today" (New York: Holt, 1915). At the other extreme, but still concerned exclusively with the literary aspect of the theatre, are these volumes of essays about individual dramatists: P. P. Howe's "Dramatic Portraits" (New York: Kennerley, 1913) and James Huneker's "Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists" (New York: Scribner's, 1905).

Of material about individual theatres, too little has been put into book form. Ernest A. Boyd's "The Contemporary Drama of Ireland" is almost exclusively an account of the literary-amateur movement which resulted in the success of the Irish Players, and so makes stimulating reading for those interested in the non-commercial theatre elsewhere. Desmond MacCarthy's "The Court Theatre, 1904–1907" (London: Bullen, 1907) is a suggestive account of the important Vedrenne-Barker art theatre experiment in London. The *Deutsches Theatre* finds extended treatment in Carter's "The Theatre of Max Reinhardt," men-

tioned above. It is unfortunate that there are no translations of A. Thalasso's "Le Théâtre Libre," which describes Antoine's experiment in detail, and Georg Fuchs' "Die Revolution des Theatres," which is a statement of the principles upon which the Munich Art Theatre was founded.

Interesting material about theatre organization may be found in Archer and Barker's "Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre" (London: Duckworth, 1911). The repertory system is treated at length in P. P. Howe's "The Repertory Theatre, A Record and a Criticism" (New York: Kennerley, 1911). Percy MacKaye's two volumes, "The Playhouse and the Play" (New York: Macmillan, 1909) and "The Civic Theatre" (New York: Kennerley, 1912), will prove suggestive rather than informative, but are worthy of attention. In order to know the organization of the business theatre, and thus to learn many things to avoid and a few to copy, the progressive worker should read Arthur Edwin Krows' "Play Production in America" (New York: Holt, 1916). It is a remarkably complete and detailed account of the commercial theatre as it exists; but it is coloured by the author's desire to make out a case for the American producer as against the European, and it shows lack of understand-

ing of some of the first principles of art theatre production.

There is no satisfactory book in English dealing with theatre architecture. The so-called standard work, Edwin O. Sachs' "Modern Opera Houses and Theatres" (London: Batsford, 1908), is important historically, but is now entirely out-of-date in its treatment of both theatre design and equipment. Material about the modern form of theatre building is scattered, and is to be found only by laborious search through many German books and magazines. The matter is touched upon briefly in Moderwell's "The Theatre of Today," Carter's "The New Spirit in Drama and Art" and my "The New Movement in the Theatre."

Current conditions in the American theatre are best reflected, perhaps, in the collected dramatic reviews of Walter Prichard Eaton and Clayton Hamilton. A more studied general review is to be found in certain chapters of Thomas H. Dickinson's valuable volume "The Case of American Drama" (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1915).

Of periodicals the most important one dealing with the new theatre exclusively is Gordon Craig's "The Mask" (Florence, Italy: The Arena Goldoni, 1908–1915). This publication is full of that stimulating quality which marks all of

Craig's writings, and it has already had great influence in shaping the progressive theatre. *The Drama, A Quarterly Review of Dramatic Literature* (Chicago: The Drama League of America, 1911–date) has published much valuable material on the literary aspect, and occasional articles of a broader nature. *Theatre Arts Magazine* (Detroit: The Arts and Crafts Theatre, 1916–date) is devoted entirely to progressive tendencies in the theatre, and is taking its place as the organ of the art theatre groups in this country.

APPENDIX

A LIST OF PRODUCTIONS AT THE ARTS AND CRAFTS THEATRE DURING ITS FIRST SEASON, 1916–1917, WITH THE CASTS

Because it was part of the purpose of this book to record in permanent form the activities of the Arts and Crafts Theatre during its first year, the full list of productions is here given, with lists of those taking part:

Dedicatory Performance: four one-act plays

I. *Sham,* by Frank G. Tompkins

Mr. Hibbert John Townley
Charles Charles E. Hilton
Clara Lento Fulwell
Reporter Loren T. Robinson

II. *The Tents of the Arabs,* by Lord Dunsany

Bel-Narb Carl Guske
Aoob Eugene J. Sharkey
The King R. J. Elliott
The Chamberlain Harry B. Elliott
Zabra Edward Loud
Eznarza Louise Vhay

III. *The Bank Account,* by Howard Brock

Lottie Benson Phyllis Povah Elton
May Harding Winifred Scripps Ellis
Frank Benson A. L. Weeks

IV. *The Wonder Hat,* by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman

Harlequin Sam Hume
Pierrot Charles E. Hilton
Punchinello A. L. Weeks
Columbine Lento Fulwell
Margot Betty Brooks

First Production of the Little Theatre Season: three one-act plays

I. *Abraham and Isaac*

The cast of this old English play was made up largely of choruses. The following were the principal participants: Sam Hume, Frances Loughton, Eugene Rodman Shippen, Carl Guske and Aldred J. Jones.

II. *The Revesby Sword Play*

Pickle Herring Theodore Viehman
The Fool William Strauer
Blue Breeches Winniett Wright
Ginger Breeches Edwin Fiske
Pepper Breeches Herbert Wagner
Yellow Breeches Theodore Keiser
Mr. Allspice David Burgess
Cicely Clyde Varney
The Hobby Horse.....Seymour Van Hauton
The Dragon Edward Loud
Mr. Music Man.....Herbert Harrison

THE MANOR HOUSE GROUP

Laura Osborne
R. J. Elliott
Sidney Corbett
Mary Glassford
Harry Elliott

III. *Ephraim and the Winged Bear,* by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman

Ephraim Bumsteeple C. E. Hilton
Bertha Eva W. Victor
A Maid Marian McMichael
Edward Sheets A. L. Weeks
A Young Woman.....Lento Fulwell
A Young Man.....Samuel L. Breck
Bear R. A. Cass

Second Production

The Chinese Lantern, by Lawrence Housman

Olangtsi C. E. Hilton
Mrs. Olangtsi Maude Haass
Yunglangtsi A. L. Weeks
Hiti-Titi Harry Elliott
Han-Kin George B. Wehner
Tee-Pee R. A. Cass
New-Lyn H. Clyde Varney
Nau-Tee Vincent Bernard
Josi-Mosi Winniett Wright
Cosi-Mosi Walter Boynton
Tikipu Don Anchors
Mee-Mee Frances Loughton
Wiowani Carl Guske

Third Production: four one-act plays

I. *Helena's Husband,* by Philip Moeller

Helena Doris Dretzka
Tsumu Mabel Woodward
Menelaus Edgar W. Bowen

Analytikos A. L. Weeks
Paris Gerald S. Patton

II. *Trifles,* by Susan Glaspell

George Henderson W. V. McKee
Henry Peters Winniett Wright
Lewis Hale L. W. Porter
Mrs. Peters Bertha Barney
Mrs. Hale Helen B. Mitchel

III. *The Glittering Gate,* by Lord Dunsany

Jim A. L. Weeks
Bill Sam Hume

IV. *The Lost Silk Hat,* by Lord Dunsany

The Caller John H. Townley
The Labourer.....A. L. Weeks
The Clerk Gerald S. Patton
The Poet Sam Hume
The Policeman Winniett Wright

Fourth Production: four one-act plays

I. *Lonesomelike,* by Harold Brighouse

Sarah Ormerod Blanche Barney
Emma Brierley Phyllis P. Elton
Sam Horrocks Sam Hume
The Rev. Frank Alleyne....Gerald S. Patton

II. *The Intruder,* by Maurice Maeterlinck

The Grandfather Carl Guske
The Father Winniett Wright
The Uncle Marshall Pease
Ursula Dora Clarke

Gertrude Dorothy Earle
Genevieve Zoe Shippen
The Sister of Charity.....Roxane Pierson
The Maid Isobel Hurst

III. *The Last Man In,* by W. B. Maxwell

Mrs. Judd Pauletta Keena Page
Mr. Judd Gerald S. Patton
Mr. Billett A. L. Weeks
A Customer Winniett Wright
The Doctor Charles W. McGannon
The Last Man In.....Sam Hume

IV. *Suppressed Desires,* by George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell

Henrietta Brewster Gertrude Kay
Mabel Doris Dretzka
Stephen Brewster W. V. McKee

Fifth Production: three one-act plays

I. *The Constant Lover,* by St. John Hankin

Cecil Harburton Eric T. Clarke
Evelyn Rivers Dora Clarke

II. *The Romance of the Rose:* a Pantomime; Scenario by Sam Hume, Music by Timothy M. Spelman, 2nd

The Nurse Helen B. Mitchel
The Girl Marjory Stearns
The Villain Carl Guske
The Father Charles E. Hilton
The Troubadour George McMahon
The Priest Clyde Varney

Harlequin Theodore J. Smith
First Dancer Albert Stewart
Second Dancer Albert Siewert
Third Dancer Floyd English
Fourth Dancer John Weiss

III. *Doctor in Spite of Himself,* by Molière; Translated by Curtis Hidden Page

Sganarelle A. L. Weeks
Martine Rebecca Clarke
Squire Robert Marshall Pease
Valere Charles E. Hilton
Lucas Gerald S. Patton
Geronte Winniett Wright
Jaqueline Irena Schnelker
Lucinde Phyllis P. Elton
Leandre George McMahon

INDEX

Abbey Theatre, 40, 48, 140, 160
Acting and actors, 96
Acting, effect of commercialization upon, 24, 122
Actor's place in art theatre, 122
Adaptable settings, Sam Hume's, 165
Advertising, 209
Amateur and professional, 115
Ames, Winthrop, 52, 53, 68, 71, 113, 219
Anglin, Margaret, 136
Antoine, 32, 33
Appia, Adolphe, 39, 60, 86, 147
Architecture, Theatre, 28, 217
Artist-Director, 37, 59, 74, 196
Artists' Guild Theatre, 195, 219
Arts and Crafts Theatre, 19, 54, 74, 89, 115, 126, 141, 150, 165, 179, 182, 193, 195, 202, 206, 213, 219, 230

Barker, Granville, 35, 139
Barnsdall, Aline, 197
Belasco, David, 146
Bernhardt, Sarah, 101
Bragdon, Claude, 65, 158
Brieux, 139
Browne, Maurice, 65, 74, 92, 107, 120, 130, 224
Buildings and equipment, 217
Business management, 68, 188

Carter, Huntly, 45, 78, 105
Chicago Little Theatre, 19, 54, 57, 74, 119, 130, 136, 141, 150, 159, 193, 213, 219, 230
Civic drama, 70, 177
Comédie Française, 135
Commercial theatre, 13, 21, 71
Community theatre, 177
Copeau, Jacques, 41, 51
Craig, Gordon, 32, 35, 36, 49, 61, 65, 74, 86, 88, 147, 160

Dalcroze method, 105
D'Annunzio, 138
Deutsches Theatre, 40, 46, 74, 104, 112
Dickinson, Thomas H., 13
Drama League, 175, 185
Dreiser, Theodore, 143
Drew, John, 110
Dunsany, 19, 59, 102, 127, 128, 138, 187

"Easiest Way, The," 142
Eaton, Walter Prichard, 29, 100
Endowment, 212
Euripides, 59, 130
Experimental theatre, 66

Free Folk Stage, Berlin, 180
Freeman, Helen, 221
Freie Bühne, 33, 34
Fuchs, Georg, 32, 86

Galsworthy, John, 35, 137

Index

Geddes, Norman-Bel, 150, 157, 159, 198
Gibson, Wilfrid Wilson, 131
Glaspell, Susan, 129, 143
Goethe, 86
Goodman, Edward, 131
Goodman, Kenneth Sawyer, 129
"Great Divide, The," 142
Grein, J. T., 34

Hankin, St. John, 129, 131
Hapgood, Norman, 29
Hauptmann, 59, 138
Head, Cloyd, 65, 143
Heron, Herbert, 197
Horniman, Miss A. E. F., 50, 213
Housman, Lawrence, 127
Hull House Theatre, 184
Hume, Sam, 74, 87, 115, 126, 129, 147, 150, 157, 165, 182, 198, 208, 224

Ibsen, 59, 131, 137
Independent Theatre, 34
Insurgent movement, 14
Intimacy, the ideal of, 68
Irish Players, 46, 106, 108, 121, 160, 212
Irving, Henry, 188

Johnson, Raymond, 147, 150, 158
Jones, Robert Edmond, 27, 147, 150

Kennedy, Charles Rann, 186
Kenyon, Charles, 142

Lighting, 157
Little Theatre, New York, 53, 71, 219
Little Theatre, San Francisco, 193
Little Theatre movement, 17, 29
Littmann, Max, 219, 221
Los Angeles Little Theatre, 150, 159, 197

Macgowan, Kenneth, 65
MacKaye, Percy, 70, 142, 177
McEwen, Katherine, 156, 198
Maeterlinck, 59, 128, 138
Marks, Josephine Peabody, 142
Martyn, Edward, 49
Masefield, John, 59
Molière, 129
Moody, William Vaughan, 186
Moore, George, 49
Moscow Art Theatre, 40, 41, 67, 74, 104, 121, 155, 160, 191, 212
Munich Art Theatre, 40, 44, 112
Murray, Gilbert, 131

Native drama, 139
Naturalistic drama, 33
Neighbourhood Playhouse, New York, 54, 186, 213, 219
New Theatre, 52, 213
Newspaper criticism, 210
Nielsen, Kay, 156
Nine O'Clock Theatre, 221

Ordynski, Richard, 197
Organization and Management, 188

Pichel, Irving, 197
"Pierrot the Prodigal," 186
Pittsburgh Theatre Association, 201

Index

Players' Club, San Francisco, 193
Players' Workshop, 24, 193
Playwriting, Effects of commercialization upon, 23
Poel, William, 136
"Poor Little Rich Girl, The," 142
Portmanteau Players, 54, 66, 70, 97, 115
Prairie Playhouse, 54, 185
Provincetown Players, 24, 54, 73, 140

Realistic drama, 33, 35, 137
Régisseur, The German, 86
Reinhardt, Max, 47, 63, 70, 74, 82, 154
Repertory organization, 143
Repertory theatres in England, 51
Rouché, Jacques, 41, 51

Schnitzler, Arthur, 131, 137
Screen settings, Gordon Craig's, 160
Shakespeare, 136
Shaw, Bernard, 35, 59, 131, 137, 139
Stagecraft, The new, 27, 144
Staging, effects of commercialization upon, 26
Stanislavsky, 74, 86
Star system, 25, 108
Starke, Ottomar, 86
Stock theatres, 72
Strindberg, 131
Stylization, 64, 154
Subscription systems, 180
Syndicate, the theatre, 21
Synge, J. M., 131, 138, 140
Synthetic ideal, 56

Théâtre Antoine, 33
Théâtre de l'Œuvre, 41
Théâtre des Arts, 41
Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, 41, 51
Théâtre Libre, 33
Théâtre Libre movement, 33
Thomas, Augustus, 142
Tolstoy, 139

Urban, Joseph, 27, 65, 151, 157, 158, 168, 224

Wagner, 86
Washington Square Players, 17, 54, 57, 73, 97, 114, 115, 121, 141, 179, 186, 230
Wilde, Oscar, 131
Wisconsin Players, 54, 67

Yeats, William Butler, 49, 65, 102, 108, 131, 138, 140, 162
"Yellow Jacket, The," 142, 186
Ypsilanti Players, 184